

I THESSALONIANS 4:13-18
WALK IN HOPE!
PART 3

Please turn in your Bibles this morning to I Thessalonians chapter 4 as we continue our study through Paul's letter to the church in Thessalonica. This morning we are going to continue looking at what the Bible has to say regarding the Rapture of the Church or the Lord coming back for His Bride, the Church! We should finish this section up next time.

I realize that for many, this is not important to them. But if you feel that way, let me ask you this. Why would God speak so much about His return for His Bride and then not want us to look forward to it? That would not make any sense and yet, the push today is to move away from Bible prophecy, including the Rapture of the Church!

There are three main New Testament passages that deal with the Rapture of the Church. First, let's look at John 14:1-3 where Jesus said, "**Let not your heart be troubled; you 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 and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.**"

Keep in mind that John is writing to the Church, so in his Gospel there is nothing mentioned about the Tribulation Period because the Church is not here during that period of time, we are caught up to be with the Lord!

Jesus is not speaking of when Christian's die here in John. He is speaking of coming and receiving us and at this meeting we are going to get our new bodies or mansions for our spirit and soul to dwell in. This is speaking of the Rapture of the Church I believe.

I want you to notice in these verses that Jesus is coming from Heaven, where He is preparing a place for us. He is coming again to receive us to Himself. And there is no mention at this point in returning to the earth for the Millennial reign of Christ but to return to Heaven where Jesus is at. Then, at the end of the seven-year Tribulation Period we will return with Him!

Also, in I Corinthians 15:50-58 we are told, **“Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell 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 trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will 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 has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’ ‘O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?’ The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”**

Notice that Paul says we shall not all sleep and the idea here is that not everyone is going to die before the Rapture. And those who have died in the Lord and those who are living in the Lord will be changed, instantaneously. In the blink of an eye we will be caught up to be with the Lord and we will have our new bodies for our spirit and soul to dwell in. It is a metamorphosis that takes place, like a caterpillar in to a butterfly!

You see, flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God because these bodies of flesh have been corrupted with sin. But, praise God, we shall all be changed!

And then, the portion of Scripture we have been looking at over the last few weeks, what Paul said in I Thessalonians 4:13-18, **“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. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. 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. 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. 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. Therefore comfort one another with these words.”**

Now we have covered these verses in detail over the last few weeks, so I am not going to go over them again. But what I want you to see once again is that at the time of this event, those who have died in the Lord and those who are living will be caught up to be with the Lord, we call it the Rapture that takes place before the seven-year Tribulation Period begins where God deals with the nation of Israel once again and He pours out His wrath upon a Christ rejecting world!

What I would like to focus on this morning is the timing of this event, when does the Rapture happen or is it even important to know? Let me say this, Jesus said to the Jews regarding His First Coming, as He looked over Jerusalem and wept, “. . . ‘If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation.’” Luke 19:42-44.

You see, Jesus held them accountable for not knowing the day the Messiah was to come and if He held them responsible that means that the Lord spoke to them in the Old Testament when this would take place.

We see this spoken of in Daniel chapter 9 where Daniel is told that from the time of the going forth to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the coming of the Messiah the Prince, it would be 173,880 days. When was this command given? This command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem was given on March 14, 445 B. C. and thus, if you counted off 173,880 days from that point, you would come to the day the Messiah the Prince would come!

That day is April 6, 32 A. D. and it is the only day that Jesus rode through Jerusalem where He allowed the people to recognize Him as the King. We call it Palm Sunday!

I believe, in regard to the Rapture of the Church, it can happen at any moment. Paul, in his day, was looking forward to it as he wrote in Titus 2:13, “looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.”

Let me ask you this. Are you looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ? I hope you are because He is our hope. I don't care what you put your hope in, all that is in this world will disappoint you, will fail you but the Lord won't!

He has promised to come back, and like the angels said to the disciples of Jesus as He ascended up into heaven in Acts 1:11, “**... ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.’**”

With that said, what I would like to focus on is the different views of the Rapture, because there are a few and I believe that only one fits what the Scriptures teach. And then, next time we will look at the one that I think fits what the Scriptures teach, that the Church is caught up to the Lord, to meet Him in the air prior to the start of the seven-year Tribulation Period, we call it the Pre-Tribulation Rapture!

CHRISTIAN RECONSTRUCTIONISM – KINGDOM NOW THEOLOGY

The first one I would like to deal with, because it seems to be growing today within The New Apostolic Movement and even in Reformed Theology circles and that is Christian Reconstructionism or Kingdom Now Theology.

Listen to what one proponent of this movement had to say and then I will share with you what this is all about. He wrote,

I became very disenchanted over time with the pessimistic mentality that the purpose of world history is to back the church into the corner and finally at the last second, right before the moment of absolute destruction, God snatches us into the heavenly realms and says: ‘Well, you lost the world, you lost your culture, you lost your children, you lost the schools, you lost all the unborn babies, you lost South Africa, you lost everything. Well done, my good and faithful servants.’ I just couldn’t buy that.”

- Source Unknown

In other words, it is our fault that the world is in the shape it is now, and thus, why are we not doing something about it now! Now I am not saying we are to do nothing, we are to occupy or continue doing the work of the Lord until He comes, but to establish His Kingdom for Him, not true.

Just listen to what they believe. We are told,

Christian Reconstructionism (also known as theonomy) is a highly controversial movement within some conservative Christian circles. It maintains that the world should be brought under (reconstructed) the lordship of Jesus Christ in all areas: social, moral, political, judicial, military, family, art, education, music, etc.

Christian Reconstructionism advocates the restoration of Old Testament civil and moral laws in order to reconstruct present American society into an Old Testament type Mosaic form and that the three main areas of society – family, church, government – should all be biblically modeled, the Bible being the sole standard. This would include severe punishments for law breakers. Some Christian reconstructionists would advocate death for adulterers, abortionists, idolaters, murderers, homosexuals, rapists, etc.

Reconstructionists strongly believe that the Bible is true and inerrant and are generally postmillennial, believing that through the preaching and teaching of the gospel, the world will be converted to Christianity and that Christ will return after a period of time after the world is converted.

Christian reconstructionists believe they are the new chosen people of God, replacing national Israel. Other religious systems would be strongly resisted.

- <https://standupforthetruth.com/2013/03/what-is-reconstructionismtheonomy/>

What is the problem with this kind of thinking, because it does sound great? The problem is you and me, man, the flesh! Not only that, but the Bible says that in the last days things are going to get worse and worse, not better and better.

Paul tells us in II Timothy 3:1-5, **“But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!”**

You see, the world is not getting better, but it is getting worse as man has turned from God and God has given them over to a debased mind and actions. Look at how sin is flaunted today! Also, the Lord establishes His Kingdom on this earth, we don't!

Another name you might hear regarding this is Kingdom Now theology! We will deal with this issue of the Rapture happening at the end of the Tribulation Period, because that again is not Scriptural and that is really what is important. Not what I think. Not what you think. But what the Scriptures say!

Calvin tried to do this and it didn't work back then, persecuting those who would not follow his ways or what he thought the Bible said. It didn't work then and it won't work today. Think about it. During the Millennial reign of Christ, at the end, there will be those who have been with the Lord for 1,000 years and yet, they will side with Satan when he is released. I can't imagine that, but that is what the Scriptures teach regarding those who make it through the Tribulation Period knowing the Lord and those born during that 1,000-year reign of Christ! So do you really think we are going to make this a Christian world by our efforts? I don't think so!

So Kingdom Now Theology or Christian Reconstructionism is not Biblical, we are not going to make this a Christian world but we are to save people out of this world! It is the Lord Himself who will establish His Kingdom on this earth!

MID-TRIBULATION VIEW

The mid-tribulation view of the Rapture of the Church says that believers will remain on the earth for the first 3½ years of the 7-year Tribulation Period and then be caught up to be with the Lord before the Great Tribulation falls upon the human race.

What I would like to do is share with you some of their main arguments and then compare them to what the Scriptures have to say. Again, that has to be our plum line, the Bible.

First, “Mid-tribulationists affirm that it is a clear teaching of Scripture that although Christians will not experience the wrath of God, believers are not exempt from tribulation in this world (Matt. 5:11-12, 10:34-35, 24:1-31; Mark 3:1-27; Luke 21:1-28; John 16:33, 17:15; James 1:2-15; 1 Pet. 4:12-19). Mid-tribulationism could be described as ‘post-trib, pre-great trib.’”
(<http://www.nobts.edu/Faculty/Itor/LemkeSW/Personal/midtribulationism.html>)

I do agree with what they are saying, in part, that Christians will not experience the wrath of God and that we will experience tribulation in this world! The big question is when does the wrath of God begin?

As you look at Revelation chapter 5 John sees that it is only the Lamb of God who is worthy to take the scroll out of the Father’s hand and lose the seals of that scroll, which unleashes the judgment of God upon a Christ rejecting world!

Then in Revelation chapter 6 we see the Lamb open the seals, Jesus opens the seals, and judgment comes forth. Now some would argue that the Antichrist is first on the scene here, the first seal. Thus, this is not the judgment of God coming upon the world but the Antichrist is coming against believers.

Who opened the scroll to bring forth the Antichrist? It was Jesus, the Lamb. Thus, this is a judgment of God upon a Christ rejecting world! So if the Church is around when the seals are opened, then Jesus is pouring out His wrath upon His Bride, the Church!

Obviously, that is wrong!

Also, they believe, “Mid-tribulationists understand the overwhelming majority of Christ’s teaching to apply to the church, not merely to Judaism. Hence mid-tribulationists do not interpret Jesus’ eschatological discourse (Matt. 24-25, Mark 13, Luke 21) as applying only to the Jews, as do many pre-tribulationists. Equating the ‘elect’ with only Israel in Jesus’ teaching in the eschatological discourse (Matt. 24:22, 31; Mark 13:20, 27) is inconsistent with that fact that His teaching in other parts of the gospels where statements addressed to the disciples clearly had the broader intent of addressing the church (Matt. 16:18-19, 18:18-20, John 17:20). It is also inconsistent with Paul’s equation of the elect and Israel with the church (Rom. 2:28-29, 8:33, 9:6-8, Gal. 3:2). Since Paul wrote his epistles at about the same time as the gospel accounts, it would seem logical that he used the terms in the same way the gospel writers did. Thus the church is best understood as being included in those that the Lord in the eschatological discourse warns will experience tribulation.

<http://www.nobts.edu/Faculty/Itor/LemkeSW/Personal/midtribulationism.html>)

Again, when you look at the Scriptures, you read what Jesus is speaking of in the Olivet Discourse there in Matthew chapters 24 and 25, you will see that He is speaking to the Jews and not the Church. The Church, the body of Christ, was a mystery to the Old Testament prophets.

As Paul said in Ephesians 3:9-10, “**and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places.**”

Not only that, but listen to what Jesus said in Matthew 24:20, “**And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath.**”

Gentiles have no problem traveling any distance on the Sabbath, but the Jews do. Therefore, Jesus is speaking to the Jews. And yes, in the Old Testament we do see, for example, the First Coming of Jesus and the Second Coming spoken of in the same verse or section of Scripture with no divisions.

But we do not see that in the New Testament. I believe all of this teaching, in Matthew chapters 24 and 25 are related to the Jews and not Gentiles because we will not be here when the Tribulation Period starts, we will be caught up to be with the Lord!

I like what J. Dwight Pentecost had to say regarding this mystery, the Church. He wrote, "The Church and Israel are two distinct groups with whom God has a divine plan. The Church is a mystery unrevealed in the Old Testament. This present mystery age intervenes within the program of God for Israel because of Israel's rejection of the Messiah at His first advent. This mystery program must be completed before God can resume His program with Israel and bring it to completion."

Absolutely! Listen to what Paul said in Romans 11:25-27, "**For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: 'The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins.'**"

Notice the events here. Blindness has happened to Israel because they have rejected Jesus. Thus, God is working with Gentiles, we call this period the Age of Grace. But notice that this period ends when **“the fulness of the Gentiles has come in”** or that last Gentile gets saved and the Lord comes for His Bride, the Church, we call it the Rapture. Then, God works with the Jews once again and the only way that He can take away their sins is when they come to the Savior, they come to Jesus. And they will, many during the Tribulation Period, all the way to the end when I believe they petition the Lord to return!

There is more we can deal with but this is the idea with the Mid-Tribulation Rapture of the Church. The Scriptures do not support the idea of Jesus speaking of the Church there in Matthew and clearly the judgment of God is being poured out when that first seal is opened, not at the mid-way point of the seven-year Tribulation Period! I do not believe that the Bible teaches a Mid-Tribulation view.

PRE-WRATH RAPTURE

Next there is the pre-wrath Rapture of the church that was made famous by Marvin Rosenthal with his 1990 book entitled “The Pre-Wrath Rapture of The Church.” I can remember when this book came out and the number of Christians who were taken in by what he was saying. But if you look at what he said and compared it to the Scriptures, it did not add up.

And did you know that he was not the one that invented this idea of the Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church. Let me give you some insight into how this all came about.

We are told,

The person who conceived the “Pre-Wrath” view of the Rapture was a man named Robert Van Kampen (1938-1999). Van Kampen became one of America’s richest men through his involvement in investment banking. During his lifetime he accumulated one of the largest private collections of rare and antique Bibles in North America.

In the 1970’s Van Kampen began developing the “Pre- Wrath” concept of the timing of the Rapture. Once he had completed his work on the concept, he started trying to find a well-known person in the field of Bible prophecy to endorse his new view.

That person finally turned out to be Marvin Rosenthal, who at the time was serving as the director of a very influential ministry called Friends of Israel. Rosenthal tried to convince the board of the ministry to abandon its commitment to the Pre-Trib view and accept the new viewpoint.

They refused, and Rosenthal was forced to depart. He went to Florida where he built the Holy Land Experience - a Christian theme park which has since been taken over by the Trinity Broadcasting Network. Today, Rosenthal serves as the director of Zion’s Hope, a ministry located in Winter Garden, Florida.

Rosenthal’s book was financed by Van Kampen’s fortune, and he mailed out thousands of copies to pastors all over America. Later, Van Kampen wrote his own books about the “Pre-Wrath” view, the most important being *The Sign* (1992).

- <http://christinprophecy.org/articles/the-pre-wrath-rapture/>

The main thrust of this teaching is, “The Rapture of the church of Jesus Christ will occur, not at the beginning of the seventieth week of Daniel, but sometime after its midpoint, just prior to the Day of the Lord. The Day of the Lord will be a time of wrath from God upon the inhabitants of the earth. Church-age believers will go through the first half of the seventieth week - three and one-half years and more but will be spared the time of wrath.”

In other words, sometime after the sixth seal, after the cosmic disturbances, the Church will be raptured, before the Day of the Lord and then His divine wrath is poured out. That is the basic premise of this view.

I will give to you two important facts regarding this issue of divine wrath which is said to occur after the sixth seal and show you why he is wrong with this idea. Also, there is so much in his book that is off, but we will look at the main thrust here.

Remember what we read in Revelation chapter 5. John begin to weep convulsively because no one was able to loose the seals of the scroll.

We read in verse 5, “**... ‘Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals.’**”

The wrath that is about to be poured out upon the earth dwellers comes by Christ Himself and thus begins the seventieth week of Daniel and the Day of the Lord. That means the Day of the Lord does not begin just past the midway period of the Tribulation Period but at the start of the seven-year Tribulation Period!

If that is not enough, during the sixth seal being poured out upon the earth dwellers, notice what the people are doing and who they are hiding from. We read “**And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?’**” Revelation 6:15-17.

Where is the wrath coming from? From “**Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand.**” He is speaking of the seal judgments being part of the wrath of God!

Now, the question we must ask ourselves is that if God’s wrath is not present until the first trumpet, after the sixth seal, why are these people hiding themselves during the sixth seal, understanding that the wrath that has come upon them is coming from God? That makes no sense!

And in Isaiah chapter 2 we see a very similar passage. We read “**For the day of the LORD of hosts shall come upon everything proud and lofty, upon everything lifted up - and it shall be brought low. . . They shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, from the terror of the LORD and the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake the earth mightily.**” Isaiah 2:12, 19.

So as you compare what the Scriptures teach to this Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church, you can clearly see that they don't match. Thus, we can toss out this idea of the Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church. And please understand, there is much more wrong with this idea that is portrayed in his book, but I think this makes it very clear, the wrath of God begins at the seal judgments!

POST-TRIBULATION VIEW

The Post-tribulation belief is as follows. The Rapture will take place at the end of the Tribulation Period, and this is very fast. The Church will be lifted to the Lord and return with Him. They believe the Rapture and the Return of the Lord are one event: that the Church will be caught up to meet the Lord as he descends from heaven. They believe there is only one coming of the Lord - at the end of the Tribulation Period.

This one is again very easy to show that it is wrong. God will not pour out His wrath upon His Bride, the Church. In fact, the wrath of God that was due us was paid in full by Jesus. He bore the wrath that was due us as He paid in full the penalty for our sins!

In I Thessalonians 5:9 Paul tells us, "**For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.**" So if the Tribulation Period is God pouring out His wrath upon a Christ rejecting world, why would we still be here? We wouldn't and we are not here, we are with the Lord!

Also, in II Peter chapter 2 Peter talks about God delivering Lot out of judgment because he was a righteous man. Now don't get me wrong here, but when you read of the story of Lot in Genesis you would never come to the conclusion that he was a righteous man.

You may remember the story. Abraham's nephew was Lot and Abraham was watching over him as they traveled. But their herds were getting too big and they needed to separate and Abraham told Lot to pick the area he wanted to live in and he would go in another area.

So Lot saw Sodom, it was beautiful, the lust of the eyes. He coveted the land of Sodom, the lust of the flesh. And Lot took Sodom for his home, the pride of life.

The problem with this city was its wickedness, the sexual immorality, the homosexuality that seemed to be practiced by most of the people of the city.

And Peter tells us that these conditions tormented or oppressed his soul. But that did not change his behavior. He failed to separate himself and his family from this ungodly living.

And in the end, he lost everything because he was so closely associated with these things and his family couldn't let go!

Now, before the judgment of God came, the angels warned Lot of this coming judgment and he tried to tell his son-in-law's, but they thought he was joking, "The judgment of God, get real" and they died in the judgment!

His wife, as they left the city she looked back and turned into a pillar of salt. And his two daughters who came out with him, they got him drunk and had sex with him, bearing children, who became the Moabites and Ammonites, enemies of the children of Israel.

For Lot himself, the angles had to pull him out of the city, he didn't want to let go.

And I think what we see here is that before the judgment of God can fall, God will remove His people. I think that the Scriptures are clear on this. That when God pours out His wrath on a Christ rejecting world, like with Sodom, God knows how to deliver the godly out, like Lot, and judge the ungodly!

Before the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, the pre-requisite to this destruction was that Lot had to be out. In Genesis 19:22 we are told that the angel said to Lot, **“Hurry, escape there. For I cannot do anything until you arrive there.’ . . .”**

In other words, the judgment of God could not fall until Lot was removed from the city. Lot was not to be part of this judgment!

And in Revelation 3:10 Jesus said to the faithful church, His bride, **“Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from [out of] the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.”**

You see, the judgment is upon the earth dwellers, and we are citizens of heaven, this is not our home. Thus, we will be kept out of this trial that is coming upon those who have rejected Christ and before that takes place, we will be caught up to be with the Lord, the Rapture will occur because, **“the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment.”** II Peter 2:9.

So the Rapture of the Church occurring at the end of the Tribulation Period, just prior to the Lord returning to set up His Kingdom, is not Scriptural.

PARTIAL RAPTURE

Here is one where I think pride is an issue. This one is called the Partial Rapture of the Church. You see, only the spiritual believers will be caught up before the Tribulation Period begins while the carnal believers will go through the Tribulation Period. You must be ***SANCTIFIED ENOUGH*** for this highly selective Rapture.

Hey, I know you guys, you are in trouble! And let me be clear, I am in trouble too! We are all in trouble if we need to sanctify ourselves enough to be caught up to be with the Lord!

Let me ask you this. How are we saved? We are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone! How do we maintain our Christian lives? We walk by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone! When we die and are taken to heaven, by what merit do we enter into eternity with the Lord? We enter into eternity with the Lord by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone!

It is as Paul says in Ephesians 2:8-9, **“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”**

Now, for those who believe in this Partial Rapture, that means you have to be good enough, live up to a certain standard, which they cannot say at what point you will be Raptured and at what point you won't. But if you can live up to some standard, usually what they have set forth, you will be Raptured to be with the Lord! But again, you can't know for sure because just before the Lord comes back, you just blasted your wife, your husband your boss, your friend, and oops, you missed out on the Rapture!

Again, if that were true, at the time of the Rapture, we would get together and as we see each other with the Lord, we would be able to say, “Hey, you made it. You must be a good guy to get in. Me too!”

What is that? **BOASTING!** What is at the forefront of boasting? **PRIDE!** But Paul says that we have been saved by grace through faith in Christ, it is a grace gift of God and thus, we have no room for boasting in what we have done but we can surly boast in all that Christ has done!

It is as Paul said in Romans 6:23, **“For the wages of sin is death, but the [free] gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** No matter what, just a little sin would then keep us from being part of the Rapture because the payment for sin is death! But the free gift of God is life with Him!

Let me also share with you I Thessalonians 4:16-17 and you tell me who will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. Paul tells us, **“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. 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.”**

So we see that those who have died in the Lord will be caught up to be with the Lord at the Rapture or they will receive their new bodies for their spirit and soul to dwell in. Also, those who remain or are alive during this Rapture will also be caught up to be with the Lord.

Did you notice what is missing here? The idea that there will be some who will not be Raptured because, although they were Christians, they just were not good enough to make it! Hey, if we are not good enough to make it to heaven before the Rapture, why do we think that we now need to achieve this standard at the Rapture? Foolishness!

I am not saying we are not to live holy lives, we are! But I am saying that the basis for our salvation is God and not our good works!

So this Partial Rapture of the Church view is not Scriptural and it is dangerous in that it makes room for pride to come into our lives thinking we are better than some. We are sinners saved by grace. Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me and you!

Now there is one last one that I want to spend some time on and look at various Scriptures, teachings where this was spoken of because I believe that this is the correct view. This view is the Pre-Tribulation Rapture of the Church or that the Church is caught up to be with the Lord prior to the start of the seven-year Tribulation Period. I think it is important to understand why we believe this is what the Scriptures are teaching and again, having as our plum line the Bible!

As we have seen, the Mid-Tribulation Rapture of the Church does not go in line with what the Scriptures say. Also, the Pre-Wrath Tribulation Rapture of the Church also does not go in line with what the Scriptures teach. And the Post-Tribulation Rapture of the Church also does not fit with what the Scriptures say. And for a Partial Rapture of the Church or those who are walking in line with the Scriptures are the only ones to be Raptured, and we are not sure where that point is, this too is not Scriptural. We are either saved by grace or, as this is showing, by grace and works for the Rapture! It is by **GRACE!**

But before we close this morning, I would like to give to you a comparison between the Second Coming of Jesus and the Rapture of the Church. As you look at this I believe you will see that they are two distinctive events.

Regarding these two events, John Walvoord tells us that these “contrasts should make it evident that the translation of the church is an event quite different in character and time from the return of the Lord to establish His kingdom, and confirms the conclusion that the translation takes place before the tribulation.”

Let me show you how these two events are different from each other.

RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH**SECOND COMING**

Translation of all believers.

No translation at all.

Translated saints go to heaven.

Translated saints return to earth.

Earth not judged.

Earth judged and righteousness established.

Imminent, any-moment.

Follows definite predicted signs including Tribulation.

Not in the Old Testament.

Predicted often in the Old Testament.

Believers only.

Affects all men.

Before the day of wrath.

Concluding the day of wrath.

No reference to Satan.

Satan bound.

Christ comes for His own.

Christ comes with His own.

He comes in the air.

He comes to the earth.

He claims His Bride.

He comes with His Bride.

Only His own see Him.

Every eye will see Him.

Tribulation begins.

Millennial Kingdom begins.

I think you can clearly see that there are many differences between the Rapture where the Lord comes for His Bride and the Second Coming where the Lord comes with His Bride!

Again, I realize that for some of you this may not be important. But why would God spend so much time sharing these things regarding the Rapture and His Second Coming if they were not important? He wouldn't. Thus, we should know these things. Dr. Renald Showers gives us this perspective on this blessed hope that is before us. He wrote,

The fact that the glorified, holy Son of God could step through the door of heaven at any moment is intended by God to be the most pressing, incessant motivation for holy living and aggressive ministry (including missions, evangelism and Bible teaching) and the greatest cure for lethargy and apathy. It should make a major difference in every Christian's values, actions, priorities and goals.

- Dr. Renald Showers, Maranatha, pp. 255-256

Remember what John wrote in I John 3:1-3, **“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”**

Knowing He can come back at any moment helps us to live with the lost before us, living holy lives and shinning for Him!

As I begin to close this morning, let me share with you these words from Dave Hunt who went to be with the Lord several years ago and yet, his words or I should say warnings were not taken to heart and we continue to go down this path of not looking for the Lord but building His Kingdom on this earth. This is what Dave had to say,

“In the early 1970s the rapture was the most-talked-about topic in the church. Pastors preached about heaven and Christians eagerly anticipated being caught up at any moment to meet their Lord in the air . . .

All of that has changed. Most Christians no longer know what they believe about prophecy. . . Those who believed in the rapture because it was popular are, of course, abandoning it now that it has become unpopular.

[And because of it] . . . The church is now ripe for the developing views of history and prophecy that either downplay or eliminate the rapture and put the emphasis upon “Christianizing” (in contrast to “converting”) the world. A new genre of books espousing the idea that “victory in Christ” means a Christian takeover of this world is coming off the presses and selling well. Such ideas are being successfully taken into mainstream evangelical churches by [groups] denigrating . . . the rapture.

Today, the once-bright hope of the church being taken home to heaven by Christ at any moment has become the butt of crude jokes and a common subject of ridicule or scorn even among many Christians. The initial ad for the Reconstructionist Biblical Blueprints book series derisively called the rapture “God’s helicopter escape.” Earl Paulk, founding pastor of the 10,000-member Chapel Hill Harvester Church near Atlanta, and a popular Christian television teacher, calls the rapture “The Great Escape Theory.”

Being taken to heaven in the rapture has been to a large extent replaced by the rapidly growing new hope that the church is destined to take over the world and establish the kingdom of God. The focus has turned from winning souls for citizenship in heaven to political and social action aimed at cleaning up society. Scarcely a sermon is being preached about the world to come. Attention is focused instead upon achieving success in this one. If we have a big enough march on Washington and vote in enough of our candidates, then we can make this world a beautiful, safe, moral, and satisfying “Christian” place for our grandchildren. This is a very enticing scenario . . . (Hunt goes on to say)

The trend . . . has accelerated. We could cite the current struggle going on in the Southern Baptist Church as one example. It is the largest Protestant denomination, but is presently losing members at a surprising and growing rate to independent churches that deny the rapture, deny any place for national Israel in prophecy, and believe that an elite group of “overcomers” will soon manifest immortality in their bodies without the resurrection or the Second Coming, and take over the world for Christ. Only then will Christ return. Not to take His bride home to heaven as the Bible clearly teaches, however, but to reign over the kingdom that has been established by her for Him here on this earth. One of the leaders in this movement writes:

“You can study books about going to heaven in a so-called 'rapture' if that turns you on. We want to study the Bible to learn to live and to love and to bring heaven to earth.”

Based only upon the amount of attention given to it in the Bible, when and how and why Christ returns must be of great importance both to God and to us. We need to seek to understand why. One reason for the significance of this issue should be quite obvious. Paul tells us that Christ is going to catch His bride away from this earth to meet Him in the air – “and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

Consequently, those who expect to meet Christ with their feet still planted on earth—a “Christ” who has arrived to take over the kingdom they have established in His name - will have been badly deceived. In fact, they could have been working to build the earthly kingdom for the Antichrist. Yet this teaching that we must take over the world and set up the kingdom for Christ has become the fastest-growing movement within the church today.

- Dave Hunt

And believe me, this is growing as Dave Hunt has said. In fact, the Bible warns us that scoffers will come in the last days denying the Lord's return. Peter tells us in II Peter 3:3-4, **“knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.’”**

The Living Bible puts these verses like this, **“First, I want to remind you that in the last days there will come scoffers who will do every wrong they can think of and laugh at the truth. This will be their line of argument: ‘So Jesus promised to come back, did he? Then where is he? He’ll never come! Why, as far back as anyone can remember, everything has remained exactly as it was since the first day of creation.’”**

There are those in the church who mock the Rapture of the Church, they mock the Second Coming of Jesus because they do not believe what the Scriptures are teaching. Listen to what Peter goes on to say, **“For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.”** II Peter 3:5-7.

If you are rejecting this, if you don't think the Lord will judge this earth, then go back and look at the flood and what happened. And I realize that many deny the flood, but if you look at this world, the evidence is overwhelming that something cataclysmic happened and water covered the face of the earth as God judged this earth.

He is going to judge it again according to the Scriptures, but before He does, the Lord knows how to deliver us from the wrath that is to come upon the earth dwellers, we call it the Rapture.

Next time we will conclude our study in *Walking in Hope* as we look at the timing of the Rapture of the Church. As I close, keep your eyes upward for our redemption is drawing nearer!