

Rapture: Blessed Hope or Big Hoax?

Revelation Series #3

Revelation 4

Introduction:

1800's a man named William Miller predicted second coming of the Lord in 1843

88 reasons why rapture is coming in 1988, sole 4.5 million copies

2012 Mayan calendar said end of the world was coming December 21, 2012

We love to know the future, but no one knows the day or hour

In the Old Testament, God gave numerous prophecies concerning the first coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. But for every prophecy in the Old Testament concerning the first coming of Jesus, there are eight more prophecies concerning the second coming of Jesus. The problem that the Jews had when Jesus came the first time is, they didn't see that the Old Testament talked about two comings. They just saw the second coming. They didn't see the Suffering Servant. They just saw the Conquering King. And so, when Jesus came and He didn't take over, they couldn't figure that out.

They said, "Messiah is supposed to be a political leader. He's supposed to take over. He's supposed to sit on the throne of David and rule with a rod of iron." All those things are true, but they're true about the 2nd coming, not the 1st coming.

Now, all Christians believe in the second coming of Jesus because the Bible clearly says that's going to happen. Jesus said Himself, "I will come again." But we differ as to the specifics of His coming. Good people, godly people, Bible-believing people can disagree about the specifics.

Many of us have grown up learning about the End Times. It was just in the last 25 years or so that Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins got together and did a series of novels called the Left Behind series - 16 books that sold 80 million dollars' worth of books and other paraphernalia associated with it.

People were on pins and needles wanting to read the next volume. What's going to happen next? Jerry Jenkins was the author. Tim LaHaye was the theologian lining things out. This happens, and then this happens, and then this

happens. Well, many said, "Yeah, that's right. That's what the Scripture says." But there are others who said, "No, that's wrong."

In today's world, many in theological circles, dismiss the idea of the Rapture of the church, especially the pre-tribulation Rapture.

Dr. Barbara Rossing, who is a New Testament professor, who wrote the book, The Rapture Exposed said this: "*The Rapture is a racket. This theology distorts God's vision for the world. It is not biblical. We are not Raptured off the earth.*" Is the Rapture Christian fiction, or is it biblical fact?

Is the Rapture of the church the Blessed Hope or is it just one Big Hoax? That's my message for today.

PRAY

This is our third message on the book of Revelation. Revelation, written by John on the Island of Patmos in 95 AD, is laid out for us in chapter 1, verse 19, when Jesus tells John, **"Write, therefore, what you have seen [chapter 1], what is now [chapters 2&3] and what will take place later [chapters 4-22]."**

Revelation 4:1-11 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." 2 At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. 3 And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne. 4 Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. 5 From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings, and peals of thunder. In front of the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God.

John hears this voice like a trumpet that says, **"Come up here."** Many bible scholars see here in verse 1 a veiled reference to what we call the Rapture. There is a trumpet, the voice of the Lord, an open door to heaven. Not everybody believes that, so let's explore what the bible says.

Let's ask and answer two questions.

1. First Question - What is the rapture.

We want to look at that today. The Rapture is the catching away of the Lord's saints. Just so you know **AG Statement of Fundamental Truth #13 is The Blessed Hope**, which is the resurrection of those who have fallen asleep in Christ and their translation together with those who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord is the imminent and blessed hope of the church.

The classic reference to the Rapture is 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Now, those that don't like the idea of the Rapture, just dismiss it. One of the arguments they make is the word **Rapture** is not even in the Bible, which is true.

Can I tell you another word that's not in the Bible? **Trinity** is not in the Bible. But the concept of the Trinity - God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit - is taught in the Bible. The Rapture is not used in the Bible, but it's taught in the Bible, and is very clearly in First Thessalonians, chapter 4.

Paul says in First Thessalonians, verse 13: "...**We do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death,**" **[Sleep doesn't mean they're taking a nap. They're dead.]** "...so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him." (NIV)

15 According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words." (NIV)

Caught up is one Greek word, **harpazo**. It means "to catch away, to seize away by force." It's used in the Bible in John, chapter 10, of how a wolf will seize a sheep and devour that sheep. It's used in Acts, chapter 8, about Philip when he was talking to the Ethiopian eunuch, and then "...the Spirit caught Philip up" from where he was and took him to another place. It's used, 2 Corinthians, chapter 12, when it says that Paul was "caught up into Paradise to see things which were

not lawful for a man to speak." That word, **harpazo**, is used 14 times in the New Testament.

The Latin word for *harpazo* is **rapturo**; that is where we get our English word **Rapture**. So, if you don't like the word Rapture, just use **harpazo**, to catch away. We see two Old Testament saints that were caught up to heaven without dying: Enoch and Elijah.

The Bible teaches that that day is coming when the Lord will come in the clouds. The Rapture is different from the Second Coming. So, just as they referred to the coming of the Lord in the Old Testament, that was in two phases - His first coming and His second coming; I believe that the New Testament talks about the Second Coming of the Lord in two phases.

I see the Rapture as the first phase of His coming. It's often put together with the Second coming, and that's what makes it difficult. But the things that are said about His coming in the clouds are far different than what is said about His coming to the earth.

There is a coming of the Lord in the clouds to snatch us away, and there's the coming of the Lord in Revelation, chapter 19 where Jesus comes on a white horse. **"And every eye shall see Him who they have pierced, and they shall mourn over Him."**

In First Thessalonians 4 He comes for His saints, and in Revelation 19, He comes with His saints – a big, big difference.

If you don't believe in the Rapture,' what do you do with 1 Thessalonians 4?

So, I believe the Bible clearly teaches there will be a Rapture.

2. Second Question – Where does the Rapture fit in on the End Times calendar?

In John 14:1-3, Jesus says, **"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. 2 My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."** (NIV)

JESUS SPOKE OF TAKING THE SAINTS AWAY TO BE WHERE HE IS

1 Corinthians 15 says, ***"51 Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— 52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53 For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. 54 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." (NIV)***

MYSTERY – WASN'T KNOWN BEFORE

THIS IS WHAT HAPPENS IN THE RAPTURE...ON OUR WAY UP WE ARE CHANGED

Philippians 3 says, ***"20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body."(NIV)***

OUR CITIZENSHIP IS IN HEAVEN – OUR BODIES WILL BE TRANSFORMED

Sometime in the future there is going to be a seven-year time period called the Tribulation; The first three and a half years will be "peaceful" and the last three and a half years will be the Great Tribulation. **SHOW END TIMES CHART**

The Bible clearly indicates that there is going to be a catching away, a Rapture. So, the issue is not, is that going to happen? The QUESTION is, when does that happen?

There are four views that theologians now have. **SHOW TRIBULATION CHART**

- A. Pre-tribulation – before any tribulation takes place
- B. Mid-tribulation – after the first three and a half years
- C. Pre -wrath tribulation
- D. Post-tribulation – after the Great Tribulation

I believe all the Tribulation is the wrath of God, so I am a pre-wrath, pre-tribulation Rapture person because First Thessalonians 5:9, ***"God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ."***

Why should we believe that the Rapture is the Blessed Hope and comes before the tribulation?

Seven Reasons

1. God has not appointed us to suffer His wrath

Stanley M. Horton said, "My first contact with another opinion came when a brother gave me a tract entitled, 100 Reasons Why the Church Will Go Through the Tribulation. I found that the 100 reasons boiled down to one: God has not promised that the Church will escape tribulation. This bothered me until the Holy Spirit directed my attention to 1 Thessalonians 5:9 — ***that God has not appointed us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.***

There is a difference between the tribulation caused by people or Satan because of our witness in this age and the wrath that comes from God on an unbelieving world at the end of the age. God poured out his wrath on Christ on the cross for our sins.

You remember the Faithful church in Philadelphia we talked about last week, they were told they would be kept from the hour of testing. Tribulation is Christ pouring out his wrath on an unbelieving people.

The salvation talked about here was the inheritance we shall receive when we are caught away, changed, and receive our new bodies that cannot be touched by decay or death. The wrath in this context is the wrath that comes on those who belong to the darkness of this world, those who will be left behind when the Church is caught away.

2. The Rapture comes before the 'Day of the Lord'

Paul talks so much in First Thessalonians and Second Thessalonians about the Rapture of the church and the coming of the Lord. Now, here was the problem and one of the reasons that he wrote the second letter to the Thessalonians:

Somebody had come into the church after Paul had left and they told them, "Hey, you missed this thing called the Rapture, because you are going through the Day of the Lord, the judgment of God." It seemed to match up with their circumstances, because in chapter 1, they were under great persecution and great distress, so it made sense. "Yeah, we've living in the Day of the Lord, and somehow, we missed the Rapture."

So, Paul writes 2 Thessalonians to them, and in chapter 2 he says: ***“Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, 2 not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching allegedly from us—whether by a prophecy or by word of mouth or by letter—asserting that the day of the Lord has already come.”***

So, Paul is writing to them to clear up their confusion, because now their hearts are all stirred up, and thinking that somehow, they're experiencing the Day of the Lord, the judgment, the wrath of God and they missed what Paul had told them was the coming of the Lord in First Thessalonians.

3. **The church is not mentioned during the tribulation.** Church is mentioned 18 times in Rev 1-3, not mentioned again until Revelation 19.

4. Tribulation period is about Israel, not the church Dan 9:24

Have you ever heard of Replacement theology...where Israel has been replaced by the church. Paul, in a letter written primarily to Gentiles, explicitly states that God is not finished with Israel. Romans 11:12 says that if Israel's rejection of Jesus is a blessing for the Gentiles, the restoration of Israel will be more so. Romans 11:25-26 goes on to say, ***“I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, 26 and in this way all Israel will be saved. As it is written: “The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.” (NIV)***

5. **If the rapture and the second coming are the same, we never go to the Father's house –**

In John 14:1-3, Jesus says, ***“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. 2 My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.” (NIV)***

6. **We are told to look for Jesus Christ, not the anti-Christ**

We are never told to look for the antichrist. We're always told to look for the Lord Jesus Christ. ***"Our citizenship is in heaven from which we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ."***

One pastor says if you know who the anti-Christ is, guess what? you got left behind. He doesn't get revealed until after the rapture of the saints.

7. We see the church in heaven before the tribulation

Rev. 4:4 Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads.

Who are these guys? 12 is an important number in the bible. There are 12 tribes in OT...12 apostles in NT...12 gates...12 foundation stones. Some say they are angels. Angels are not redeemed beings. They don't wear crowns. But, when John sees the 24 elders, I believe he sees the redeemed of the OT and the redeemed of the NT. We beat the tribulation by 2 chapters.

The Bible tends to indicate very clearly, "Hey, you don't know when I'm coming, so you just be ready, because I could come at any moment." Now listen! If Jesus is not coming back until the middle of the Tribulation, I can tell you for sure He's not coming back today. He's not coming back tomorrow. He's not coming back next year. He's not coming back two years from now.

It's because if He doesn't come back till the middle of the Tribulation, we haven't started the Tribulation yet. So, you would know. But Jesus said, "No one knows the day or the hour."

The post-tribulation position, which says, hey, the church is going to go through the Tribulation. There's suffering in our future. How can we comfort one another with those words like Paul told the church to do.

If we go up after the tribulation, we just go up to come right back down. It's like, "Why did You Rapture me?"

First John, chapter 3 says that "When He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." We're glorified during the Rapture. Philippians, chapter 3, "For our citizenship is in heaven from which we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with

the body of His glory through the exertion of the power that He has, even to subject all things to Himself." When the Rapture comes, I'm changed.

So, I believe with all my heart in the pre-tribulation Rapture.

That means that Jesus could come back at any moment. We don't know when He's coming. The Rapture doesn't give us signs. The second coming has tons of signs. You read in Revelation all the signs that are going to take place. We read in Matthew, chapter 24 all the signs that take place.

At the Rapture, He comes for His saints. At the return, He comes with His saints. At the Rapture He comes to rescue and to snatch His bride out of the wrath that is to come. At the return He deals out flaming fire, and He deals out retribution to those who do not know God.

CONCLUSION:

In the Book of the Revelation there are seven letters to seven churches, and the last letter that the Lord gives and the last church the Lord speaks to is the church at Laodicea.

And it's very interesting that, that's the last one at the end of chapter 3, just before Revelation chapter 4 verse 1 that speaks to the Rapture.

Now what was that church like? Revelation 3:15-16 Jesus said this to that church ***"I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I would that you were cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot or cold, I will spit you out of My mouth."***

What does a lukewarm Christian look like?

The lukewarm Christian doesn't really care. He's just indifferent about things, there is no passion for the Lord there's not excitement there's no zeal.

Now they're excited about other things they're excited about their job they're excited about their favorite sports team they're excited about their golf game, they're excited about those things, they're excited about their favorite television shows, they're **not** excited about Jesus Christ.

They are the some who are in every church they're those who profess Christ but they don't possess Christ. They are the tares among the wheat they are the ones

that don't really belong to the Lord they have a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof.

They don't really pray. Look what He says about this church "Because you say, (notice what they say) 'I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing.'" You know when you start thinking you have need of nothing, you don't feel the need to pray.

Watch what God says, "***you're wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.***"

Illustration: Do you remember the children's story written by Hans Christian Anderson "The Emperor's New Clothes"? Do you remember that story, the Emperor was going to get some new clothes and what did he get? He got two guys that told him they were going to make him a great suit that was made of invisible material. And they conned the emperor and they ended up parading him out before the people and he didn't have anything on.

They said, "Only the wise only the smart only those who are in the know can see the beautiful threads." And the king was so arrogant and he was so pompous and so proud he didn't want to say "Well I must be one who's not very wise because I can't see anything." So, he just pretended and all the people went along with him and they just pretended and they said "Look at the king's beautiful clothes." Till finally one little kid said "Hey, the king's naked!"

God says "You need to see that you are naked, wretched, miserable, poor, and blind."

Three things are important to remember.

First, the teachings and parables of Jesus urge us to be on the watch, be alert, be on guard, so that we are not found in a careless or sinful state when He comes. Our Lord's coming will take people by surprise. But those who keep busy about the Lord's work will not be surprised, for they will be ready (1 Thess 5:4–11).

Second, Jesus made it clear that when He returns, it will be as in the days of Noah. The people heard the preaching of Noah; but the day the Flood came, they had their plans made. They supposed that day would be the same as any other day. But that day the judgments began to fall.

Jesus further showed that when He comes, people will be going about their regular daily tasks. There will be no separation in this between believers and unbelievers, no mark of the beast yet. Of two working together, one will be "taken" to be with Jesus in the Rapture. The other will be left behind to suffer the judgments of the Tribulation (Matthew 24:37–41).

Third, Jesus emphasized that no one except the Father knows the day or the hour of His coming (Matthew 24:36). The times and the seasons, the days and the dates are all in the Father's hands (Acts 1:7).

Our business is not to concern ourselves so much about times and seasons as about the Great Commission. Acts 1:8 is our responsibility. Jesus wants to find us waiting, watching, and working. Let us give ourselves to the task. Then if Jesus comes in the midst of it, or whenever He comes, we shall surely hear His "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

There are three things that are beginning to happen now - prior to the Rapture.

Number one: There will be a falling away from the faith. "Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come (the Day of the Lord) unless the apostasy comes first..." The word apostasy means "to fall away."

There's going to be a falling away from the truth, and a falling away from the faith. We're seeing that before our eyes. Churches caving to things that the Scripture is very clear about.

Secondly: There will be a removing of the restrainer. Verse 6, speaking of the coming of the antichrist, "You know what restrains him now, so that in his time he may be revealed. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way."

People have said, "What does that refer to." Somebody is restraining this revealing of the antichrist. Well, who's restraining that? I believe it's talking about the Spirit-filled church - the Holy Spirit of God living in believers - that's what restrains evil from just taking over.

Now, there's precedent to this. When the angels, in Genesis 19, were sent by God to Sodom and Gomorrah to check out the city to see if the wickedness was that great, they came to destroy it. There was Lot, he's a polluted believer

because you can't live in the city of sin and be unaffected, and he was affected. They said to Lot, "You need to get up and leave this city." Lot said, "Can I go to this city, Zoar? It's small.

Let me go there." And they said, "Hurry and go, for we can do nothing until you arrive there." They couldn't destroy the city until Lot was safely out.

The church is, one day, going to be Raptured. Now, that doesn't mean every church member. It means everyone who is truly born again. And just so you know, if you've never really been born again, you will get left behind.

When God takes His church out, then there's no more restrainer. It doesn't mean the Holy Spirit is not still around, because no one can get saved apart from the Holy Spirit, but the influence, the light, and the salt of the church, is gone. That fits in with the pre-tribulation Rapture.

When the restrainer is removed, then what happens? The third thing is:

There will be the revealing of the antichrist.

When is the antichrist revealed? After God removes the church at the Rapture. We are never told to look for the antichrist. We're always told to look for the Lord Jesus Christ. **"Our citizenship is in heaven from which we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ."**

First Thessalonians, chapter 1, Paul says: **"For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead; that is, Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come."**

Scripture emphasizes that Jesus can come at any moment. Our responsibility is on living in obedient service and effective witness in light of His imminent return. So, here's the big question as we close out today: If the Rapture can come at any moment, and Jesus said "You don't know when I'm coming. You just be ready." If it came today, **are you Rapture ready?**