

36. Ready or not, here I come

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While I was involved in the Prison Ministry from Calvary Tucson, I used to go out to the Echo Unit in Arizona State Prison Tucson Complex for twelve years. I could say, "I've done my time." One of the prison chaplains whom I've met told the inmates that there is no word 'rapture' in the Bible, so the rapture is nothing more than a figment of radical Christians' imagination. As one of those radical Christians, I'd like to tell him and the people like him that there is no word 'Bible' in anywhere in the Word of God. But the Word of God remains no matter what they say. By the way, he was one of those liberal chaplains who used to work out there in the prison to pick up paychecks, not for ministry.

Before we go into the study of Matthew 24, we must understand the meaning of the rapture.

A. WHAT IS THE RAPTURE?

1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 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.

The word translated 'caught up' in the Greek is 'harpazo,' which means 'to be taken away by force.' It's usually used as a military term related to the taking of hostages. The Latin Vulgate translates 'harpazo' as 'raptuse,' and that's where we get our English word 'rapture.' Jesus will return to rapture His church. That's a promise of God.

This is not the same thing as the Second Coming of Christ by the end of the Tribulation. As we studied before, the Second Coming is to judge the unbelieving world, but the rapture is to take away the believers into heaven before God unleashes His fury on the unbelieving habitants of the earth.

B. WHEN IS IT GOING TO HAPPEN?

1) The time is near

Matt 24:32-35 "Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near--at the doors! Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.

The fig tree is the symbol of Israel nationally, historically, and scripturally. On May 14, 1948, the fig tree blossomed once again when the land of Israel was returned to the Jews. Jesus said the generation that sees that event take place will not pass away. Who is that generation? We are.

2) No one knows the day

Matt 24:36-39 "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah

entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

Jesus told us that His Word is final and there cannot be anyone who can reverse His Word. However, we find many stupid people come up with stupid things about the rapture.

Jesus said, "No one knows." In Greek, it is "No one knows." In Korean, it is "No one knows." I don't know which part of this "No one knows" people don't understand. Whenever some la la land theologians come up with fancy formulas that woo people the date and time of the rapture, people go for it hook, line and sinker all the way. They'd rather believe what stupid men say more than what Jesus said.

Among many of the controversial Christian doctrines, we find that the rapture is one of the top ranking hot topics. Many who are much smarter than me, have more Bible knowledge than me strongly believe that the rapture would happen during the tribulation. We call them 'Mid-Trib' people. There is another camp of theologians who again are so much smarter me believe that the rapture would happen after the tribulation. We call them "Post-Trib." So, which one is the right one? It is OK for them to be wrong. The majority of the Bible scholars whom I admire and respect believe that it is the "Pre-Trib." That is what I believe. I will explain it to you a little later.

Is it important to enough to make a big deal out of it? Yes, if you don't understand this well, your eschatology which means the end time prophecy will completely go out of whack.

There were three things that signified the days of Noah:

First, The people in the days of Noah were more concerned about daily life things more than spiritual things.

We can make parallel lines between the day of Noah and current situations. The people around the world are more concerned about the latest fashions than their eternal salvation. It is a dangerous thing to get so absorbed in the pursuits of life that we forget Jesus is coming for the rapture.

Second, in the days of Noah, there were abnormal sexual practices abounded according to Gen 6:1-4.

The hierarchy of the Episcopal Church is encouraging homosexual union as a pathway to personal holiness since 1990. In our country, legal pornography is now a multi-billion dollar industry. In Europe and Japan, showing nudity during the prime time on TV is considered no big deal.

Third, in the days of Noah, violence filled the earth according to Genesis 6:11.

I read recently that the high rate of suicide among policemen is attributed to the fact that of the thousands of violent crimes committed in this country, only a handful of criminals are brought to justice. No wonder policemen are frustrated and suicidal. Violence runs rampant, while justice is hamstrung.

It took 120 years to build the ark by Noah. God was using that time to allow the people to repent from their sins, but no one did. Since 1970's Jesus Movement, God was gracious to extend His mercy to all of us. Did we repent during the Desert Storm operation? No. How about after 9/11? No again. God gives us opportuni-

ties after opportunities. I hope and pray that America soon turns from her wicked ways and repents and seeks God. He will forgive us and heal this land before it gets too late.

3) Left behind

Matt 24:40-41 Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left.

Can you imagine a chaos on this earth? Especially, the people whose loved ones whom they thought 'Jesus Freaks' all disappeared and no where to be found. There will be car crashes and plane crashes due to missing Christian drivers and pilots. However, those who thought they are Christians but don't have personal relationship with Christ will be left behind. There will be much cries, sorrows and panics, because they'll realize that they miss the rapture. They still can go to heaven, if they repent and live in faith with the willingness to be killed for the name of Jesus. If not, they will end up receiving the mark of the beast and they become the enemy of God like satan.

4) No one knows the hour

Matt 24:42-44 Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Jesus used Noah to warn that men will not know the day, and He used the picture of the burglar to warn that they will not know the hour.

Even though Jesus said, "No man knows the time," but I know when it is going to be. It will between 8-9 am. I am absolutely biblically correct. Why? Because when Jesus comes back to get us for the rapture, it will be between 8-9 am somewhere around the world. I didn't say here in the United States.

C. WHY DO THOSE PEOPLE BELIEVE OTHERWISE?

Why do some people in the Lord want to discredit the Pre-Trib? Because they couldn't defend their concept with the Scripture. The reason why people take prophecies in different views is because some take prophecies in allegorically, instead of literally. Those who take prophecies allegorically are Mid-Trib or Post-Trib.

One argument is based on the interpretation of the 'last trump' in I Corinthians 15. Some try to link this with the seven trumpet judgments of Revelation and say that the seventh trumpet is the last trump. I see a problem with this. The seven trumpet judgments in Revelation are given to the seven angels to sound and to bring in the corresponding judgments upon the earth. When we examine who is blowing each of these trumpets we see that they are all angels. The trumpet of the Rapture is not that of an angel. It's the trump of God!

If you believe the "Mid-Trib" theory, you cannot go with the truth of "No-One-Knows-the-Date-of-the-Rapture." When the Anti-Christ will set up his statue as God in the third temple in Jerusalem which means the abomination of desolation, that is the time when the rapture will happen. Everyone will know the date of the rapture by that sign.

The "Post-Trib" theory is worse than "Mid-Trib." At the end of the Great Tribulation, there will be the final war Armageddon. Right after that, there will be the Second Coming of Christ. Where are they going to put the rapture? Right before the Second Coming of Christ? Again, if that is the case, everyone will know the date of the rapture.

D. WHY DOES NOT THE BIBLE MAKE CLEAR ABOUT THE TIME OF THE RAPTURE FROM THE BEGINNING?

I believe it is God's intention that every church age be convinced they are the last generation. I also believe that God's divine design is for the church to live in constant expectancy of the Lord's return.

E. WHAT ARE WE SUPPOSED TO DO WHILE WE WAIT FOR THE RAPTURE?

Matt 24:45-51 "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. But if that evil servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The most dangerous lie is not "There is no God", nor "there is no hell." But the most dangerous lie of satan is "There is no hurry." It is not small thing to say "Jesus is not coming today, or for several years." We need to be ready for the immanent return of Jesus Christ.

2 Thessalonians 2:6-8 And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. 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. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.

I do not believe that the Antichrist can take over the rule and authority of the earth while the church is still here. I believe that the Holy Spirit within the church is the restraining force that is holding back the powers of darkness from completely engulfing and overwhelming the world right now.

But the moment the church is removed, there will be nothing to hinder or hold back the powers of darkness from taking total control. That which restrains shall restrain until He is taken out of the way.

This is the reason why I'm not looking for the Antichrist. This is just another subtle and deceitful device of satan, that leads people to be looking for the Antichrist rather than looking for Jesus Christ.

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

Until yesterday, I interpreted this verse 7 as the Holy Spirit will be taken out of the earth with the church at the rapture. However, I was wrong. The reason is that no one can bring people to Jesus except the Holy Spirit. He will do that to those who left behind people, so that they may come to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior during the Tribulation time. But the Holy Spirit will no longer restrains satan and He will be out of the way of satan.

The Rapture can take place at any time. There are no prophecies that have yet to be fulfilled before the Rapture occurs. I firmly believe that the church will not go through the Great Tribulation.

Depend on how you live for Christ, your heart will be encouraged when you hear the trumpet call of God for Rapture. If you don't live for Him, your heart will turn to shame for His coming.

F. APPLICATIONS

I believe that God wanted every church age to believe that it was the last. Believing this has a three-fold effect:

1) It gives us an urgency for the work that we are doing, to get the Gospel out.

The people around you and me are living and dying without Jesus. It is our job and privilege to let them know about Jesus.

2) It gives us a correct perspective of material things.

Everything we have here on earth will remain on earth when that trump call of God sounds and we leave this earth. Let's hold everything loosely. We are not here on earth for those things. We are here for the glory of God.

3) It maintains a purity in our lives.

Let's keep a short account with our God for our sins. Let's constantly keep our eyes on Jesus who is the Author and Finisher of our faith.

Let's be ready. Let's watch. Let's be wise.