

# The End: The Rapture

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Last week, we scratched the surface of the end times. We learned that the end of the world will certainly come. Although only the Heavenly Father knows the exact date and time that this will occur, we were given signs to watch for that will indicate that the end is near.

Many of the signs that Jesus gave us are already occurring, which He said indicate the beginning of the 'birth pains' of the end times. We were warned that this should not cause us to be fearful or alarmed, but to speed the coming of the end by sharing the good news of God's salvation. We are to be ready at all times since we never know when our end might come; whether by death or the return of Christ.

When we begin to review what scripture teaches about the end times, we find that there is plenty of obscurity and room for interpretation of what exactly will occur and when. I believe that this was purposed by God. We find that His word contains precise details and prophecy regarding the arrival, death, and resurrection of Jesus. We know exactly how to accept God's salvation and much about living a Christian lifestyle. This should give us incredible insight and clarity on the will and concerns of God.

His concern is not that we determine exactly when He is returning so that we can prepare at that time. His concern is that we live our life with His coming ever in mind; living each minute as if though it could be our last. His concern is that we live our lives for Him and according to His will.

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Now, let's take a look at the events of the end. Again, there are many different views and opinions on the timing of when these events will take place and details on how these events will take place. This morning, we'll go through scripture and review what is taught about these events.

On that unknown day of the end, the first event that will occur is the rapture of the church (those who accepted Christ's salvation); both the dead and alive. That is the time when we all exit this world and are taken up into Heaven. Now, you won't find the word rapture anywhere in scripture, but it is the word commonly used to describe this event. Although the word itself isn't used in scripture, the event itself clearly is.

The word rapture defined is a feeling of intense pleasure.

For believers on that day, indeed, the rapture will be a time of such intense pleasure as we are called home to be with the Lord forever!

Also, the word rapture comes from the Latin term raptus which means "to seize." The Latin word is based on the Greek term harpadzo, meaning "caught up" or "to grab or seize suddenly so as to remove or gain control of. That's exactly what will happen on the day of the rapture, we will be seized and caught up by Jesus, removed from this world as we know it forever.

This event is commonly mislabeled as the second coming of Christ. At the rapture, those saved are called up to meet with Christ, but Christ does not actually return to earth. We'll take a look at a later time at the actual second coming of Christ, where He comes and sets foot on the earth again. We'll see how these two events are radically different and separated from each other.

Let's take a look now in scripture at what is told of the rapture.

## **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**

13 Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. 14 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. 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.

Also, regarding this event, Jesus wrote:

## **Matthew 24:40-41**

40 Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. 41 Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.

It might be a little something like this:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D6yew5H2Fb0>

You won't want to be left behind on this glorious day! Today is the day of our salvation if we only choose to accept this free gift from God!

Another reason for this great joy is not only us meeting up with the Lord, but also that at this time of our resurrection, we will also receive new bodies! These bodies given to those who accepted Christ's salvation will last for all eternity and will never again experience pain, sorrow, sickness, or death.

### **1 Corinthians 15:35-58**

35 But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?" 36 How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. 37 When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. 38 But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. 39 Not all flesh is the same: People have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. 40 There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. 41 The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor. 42 So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; 43 it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; 44 it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. 45 So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. 46 The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. 47 The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man is of heaven. 48 As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are of heaven. 49 And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man.

50 I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 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."

55 "Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?"

56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

58 Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

We now understand what scripture teaches about the rapture and what the resurrection of our bodies will be like. We do not become angels nor do we roam the earth as lost souls or ghosts upon death. This knowledge of truth, however, gives us hope in the midst of the grief brought about by death. We know that death is not the final end for us.

Though our natural bodies are laid to rest and that they return to dust, we will be raised again and given new and glorious bodies. On that day, we will finally receive the final victory over death through Jesus. Paul also explains in 2 Corinthians 5 that our bodies are like tents that will be taken off as our mortal bodies pass and we are given new bodies clothed for eternal life.

It is then following the rapture of the church that our focus becomes split. Over the next seven years, several events simultaneously occur in heaven as well as on earth. You can begin to imagine what it will be like on the earth as followers of Christ just suddenly vanish into the sky.

On earth, seven years of great tribulation are about to begin where God pours out His wrath and judgment on those who have denied the salvation that He provided for them.

In heaven, believers face the bema judgment of Christ where their works done on earth are judged and rewarded. They then celebrate the greatest wedding party ever in existence as Christ, the groom, and the church, His bride, are finally brought together in perfection and unity for all eternity.

We know that Christ paid the penalty for the judgment of sin once and for all on the cross. For those who have accepted this salvation, we will not pay the price for our sins. This salvation is the free gift of God given to us through our faith alone and cannot be obtained nor lost by our works or deeds.

In closing, we're going to take a look at this judgment for believers known in the greek as the bema, or the judgment seat of Christ. This is not to be confused with the great white throne judgment that we will review at a later time where the decision is made on heaven or hell. This judgment is one that believers alone will face before Christ where He will

take into account the works done in our lives in order to reward us for the good works that we accomplished following rapture.

Let's take a look at this judgment in scripture:

### **Romans 14:8-12**

8 If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. 9 For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. 10 You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. 11 It is written: "As surely as I live," says the Lord,

'every knee will bow before me;

every tongue will acknowledge God."

12 So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.

### **2 Corinthians 5:6-10**

6 Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. 7 For we live by faith, not by sight. 8 We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. 9 So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

### **1 Corinthians 3:10-15**

10 By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. 11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, 13 their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. 14 If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. 15 If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.

### **1 Corinthians 4:1-5**

1 This, then, is how you ought to regard us: as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed. 2 Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. 3 I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. 4 My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. 5 Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God.

### **Colossians 3:23-24**

23 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, 24 since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

The bema seat judgment is one where not only our works, but more importantly our heart motives behind our works, are judged and rewarded. Our good works done to the glory of God will be rewarded by Him. We will be praised by God, Himself. Although we don't see for certain what the tone or atmosphere of this judgment will be, I would imagine that it will overall be one of great rejoicing and praise. I would imagine that there may also be a time of sorrow or regret as we stand before Christ and watch as He judges the works done throughout our lives. However, that time would quickly fade as we receive our rewards and praise from God.

Next week, we'll review these seven years and the other events which will occur in more detail.

This morning, however, we are left with a challenge. If the rapture were to occur right now, would you be caught up with the Lord or would you be left behind?

If you know for certain that you would be caught up with the Lord, what would the bema seat be like for you? Imagine Jesus replaying your life with you in detail far greater than even our high def technology today; nothing hidden, not even your thoughts or the motives of your heart. Would Jesus rejoice and praise you for the good things that you did with your life, or would there be much shame and regret?

This morning, you can leave knowing for certain that you would be caught up with the Lord at the rapture. This morning, you can make an intentional decision to begin recording for yourself a different life. In the end, what really matters? In the end, what really counts?

The good deeds that we do for the glory of God alone are the silver, gold, and precious stones that will withstand the fire of the Lord's judgment. Don't be like the one who escapes the flames, but receives no reward. Decide this morning to fully dedicate your life and all that you do to the Lord. This doesn't necessarily mean that you should quit your job and enter full time ministry. It simply means that whatever you do, you do it with passion, with you full heart; and you do it for the Lord and His glory. You do all that you do as ministry and service to God.

This morning, let's close in prayer and commit our ways to the Lord.