

The Rapture Comes Next

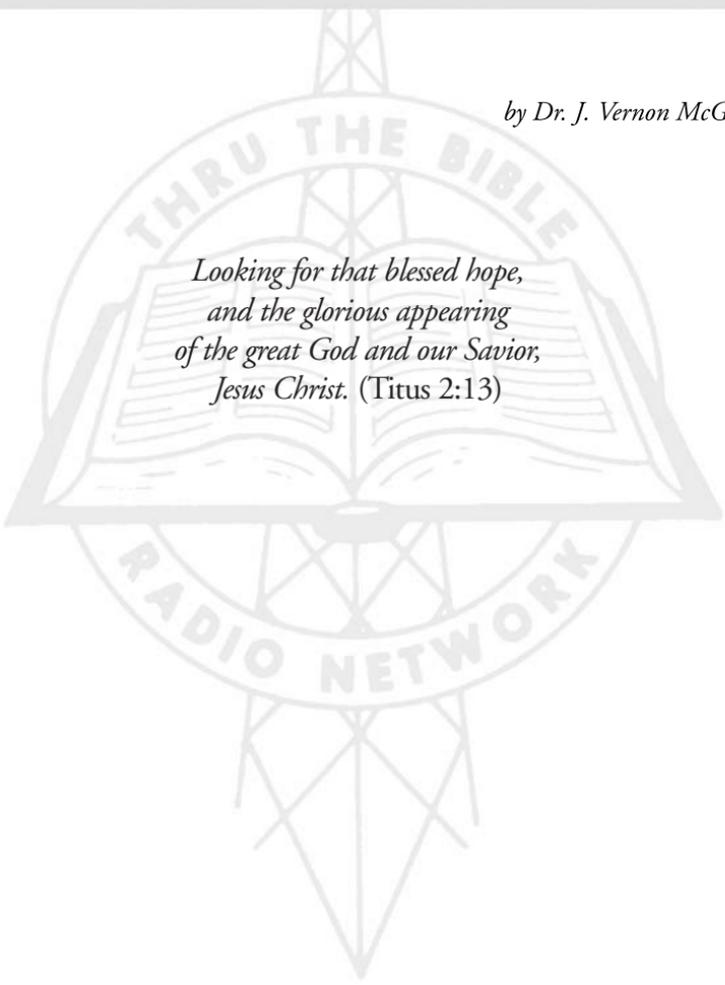
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*Looking for that blessed hope,
and the glorious appearing
of the great God and our Savior,
Jesus Christ. (Titus 2:13)*

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The Rapture Comes Next

If you are a believer today and are trusting Christ, you are next on the program of God – as far as prophecy is concerned. I believe it is tissue-thin between where we stand today and the Rapture of the church. There are no signs, no Tribulation, no *anything* to be fulfilled before Jesus takes the church out of the world. This does not mean we know *when* He is coming, because that is something that the Scriptures absolutely do not reveal. We cannot know the day, the hour, the minute, or the “twinkling of an eye” when this event will take place (1 Corinthians 15:52). But our attitude should be that of “looking for that blessed hope” (Titus 2:13). The phrase “looking for” is from a Greek word meaning “entertaining.” It is a glorious and delightful future prospect to which one would look forward.

What do I mean by Rapture? To define the word very briefly, the Rapture is the moment when Christ takes believers, which I shall call “the church,” out of the world. And that fits into a time program that God has put down, because He moves in a very orderly manner. I believe that next on the program of God comes the Rapture when He will take the church out of the world. Then after that I believe there will be a time of Great Tribulation, which is concluded with the return of Christ to the earth to set up His kingdom. This has been labeled “the Revelation” – and I feel accurately so, because the Book of Revelation deals with the Great Tribulation and the coming of Christ at the end of the Great Tribulation to establish His kingdom. You can see that this is a very orderly program that God is following.

There are those today who deny the Rapture because they say it is a term that is not used in the Bible. Their argument is that the Bible, therefore, does not teach the Rapture. Well, I must categorically deny that, because in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 Paul says:

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 so shall we ever be with the Lord.

Now the phrase “caught up” is the Greek word *harpazo* meaning “to lift, to snatch up, to draw up, to transport.” It has several meanings, and one meaning is “to rapture.” So you can exchange the translation of *harpazo* from “caught up” to “rapture” – “Then we who are alive and remain shall be raptured together with them in the clouds” – and your translation would be as good as the one we have in the Authorized King James Version. I confess that I prefer the translation “caught up,” but let’s understand that the word “rapture” is in the Bible, and there is no ambiguity here. When one denies that the Bible teaches the Rapture, he is arguing semantics and not eschatology. And, candidly, I am not interested in going into the field of semantics.

There is another fallacy that is exploited by those who like to dismiss the Rapture. They maintain that when we say Christ is coming to take the church out of the world and that He will not return to the earth until the end of the Great Tribulation Period (which obviously is the future seven-year period outlined in the Book of Daniel), we are saying that we believe in a second and *third* coming of Christ. They accuse us of believing that the Rapture is a second coming and the Revelation is a third coming of Christ. Well, that type of argument is, to my judgment, not dealing with the subject at all. First, let me remind you that at the Rapture Christ does not return to the earth. Rather, He takes His own away from the earth. He does not come to it. However, at the Revelation Christ *does* come to the earth, which is the Second Coming. We call this the Revelation. He is coming at that time to set up His kingdom.

Now let's make a comparison. At Christmastime we celebrate the birth of Christ. At Easter we commemorate the death and resurrection of Christ. At the incarnation the emphasis is put upon a *baby*. The Israelites hadn't been looking for Him to come that way. As George MacDonald put it, "They were looking for a king to lift them high./He came a little baby thing that made a woman cry." Christ came into the world as a baby. After Jesus' birth, Scripture is silent. Except for one isolated reference that Dr. Luke gives us, we have no other report until about thirty years later. That period of thirty years we call the silent years in the life of Christ. That is a very important period, yet we are told almost nothing about it. Then Jesus steps out into public view. For thirty years He had lived a life of obscurity in that little town of Nazareth. Now He moves out and teaches publicly for three years, then goes to the cross, is buried, and is resurrected. This coming of Christ is for redemption. The first aspect or appearance was incarnation; the second aspect or appearance was redemption. Now there is a wide difference between the two – a little baby (incarnation) and a man on a cross (redemption). Anyone, I am sure, would recognize the difference. But we do not call that the first and second coming of Christ. We package it up in one coming, which is proper.

We do the same thing for His coming for the church, then later His coming to establish His kingdom on the earth. We put both in one package – and I can see nothing wrong with that. There is a wide difference, though, between the Rapture and the Revelation. The difference is not only in time. At the Rapture, He comes as the Bridegroom to take His bride, His church, out of the world. Remember that He does not come to the earth at that time at all. But at the Revelation He comes to the earth as a King to establish His kingdom.

Now as we look at the Rapture and the Revelation of Jesus Christ and the contrast between the two, I would like to deal with three different aspects of the subject:

- (1) The *action* of each is different.
- (2) The *attitude* toward each is different.
- (3) The *anticipation* of each is different.

The *action* of the Rapture and the Revelation are different. There are certain physical factors connected with both of these events that bear no similarity at all. They are antipodes apart. In the *attitude* toward these there is a difference. There are certain psychological factors involved which are altogether different. Then in the *anticipation* there are several spiritual factors involved, and they likewise are quite different.

Action

Keep in mind that at the time of the Rapture Christ does not come to the earth. He does not touch down on the Mount of Olives. In fact, He does not come to the earth proper.

The Lord Jesus was the first one to say anything about the Rapture. He mentions it the first time in the Gospel of John:

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.

(John 14:2)

The “Father’s house” is this vast universe in which we live. The “many mansions” are abiding places, in the Greek, *monē*. Out yonder in space there are many abiding places. But Jesus said, “I go to prepare a place for you,” that is, for His own. It is quite obvious that the place He mentions is not on earth, because He left this earth when He ascended. Paul amplifies that statement, adding a great deal of detail:

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall 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 so shall we ever be with the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17)

The Lord Himself is coming and we (that is, those who are His own) are to meet Him in the air. “So shall we ever be with the Lord.” Now that is specific. There is no way that we can misunderstand that.

However, at the Revelation He will come to the earth and touch down on it. In Zechariah’s prophecy we read:

And his feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall cleave in its midst toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south. (Zechariah 14:4)

This is so specific, dealing with geographic places, that we are to take it literally. That is, when Christ comes the second time, His feet are to touch down on the Mount of Olives.

Let me illustrate with a familiar event in our day. In the first “moon shot,” Frank Borman and his crew went around the moon, but they did not touch down. To me, one of the most thrilling pulpits from which I ever heard the Bible read was on Christmas Eve 1968 when the astronauts in that little module that was going around the moon read Genesis 1. I don’t know when I ever have been so thrilled to hear the Word of God read as I was that Christmas Eve. Now Frank Borman did not touch down on the moon, but he went to the moon. Then on the second moon shot, Neil

Armstrong touched down – he actually put his foot down on the surface of the moon. I suppose more than half the world saw him take that step. So we say that Armstrong was the first man *on* the moon, but actually Borman went *to* the moon. The parallel is quite similar. The Lord Jesus is coming but is not going to touch down. His church is going to meet Him in the air. Then we are told that He will come later and put His foot down on the Mount of Olives. That, my friend, is going to be a far greater touchdown than when man touched down on the moon!

There is another tremendous contrast. At the Rapture *believers* are removed from the earth. This is something that is very important to observe. Concerning the Rapture, the Lord Jesus said:

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 unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also. (John 14:2, 3)

In other words, “I am going to come Myself, and I am going to take you out of this world to be with Me.” This, I think, is quite clear. *Believers* are removed from the world at the Rapture.

But at the Revelation, *unbelievers* are removed from the earth. The Olivet Discourse has nothing whatever to do with the Rapture of the church, because Jesus is not talking about the church. He simply is answering questions the apostles have put to Him. In Matthew's account, He answers two of those questions: (1) What is the sign of the end of the age? and (2) What is the sign of His coming? In response to the first question, He gives this:

But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving

in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left. (Matthew 24:37-41)

Many folk think this refers to the Rapture, but He is not talking about the Rapture in the Olivet Discourse. It is quite obvious what He is saying if we will just let Him say it. As to the conditions that will exist in the world at the end of the age, He likens them to the days of Noah. And when the flood came in the days of Noah, we are told that it took them all away. Whom did it take away? Noah and his family? No. Noah was left here on the earth to continue the existence of the human race. But it was that crowd of unbelievers, that crowd of great sinners, who were removed from the earth. They were the ones taken away in judgment. Jesus says here, “Just as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be when the Son of Man comes.” Comes where? To the earth. Who will be taken away? Those who are judged. He leaves those here who will enter into the kingdom to continue human life on this earth.

Notice the differences, the physical contrasts. At the Rapture, believers are removed; at the Revelation, unbelievers are removed. At the Rapture, there are no signs; at the Revelation, there are many signs. In fact, Matthew 24 answers the question as to the signs of His coming to the earth to establish His kingdom. For example, He says, “When ye, therefore, shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place” (Matthew 24:15). I know He is not talking to me, because I don’t have a holy place. The only people I know who ever had a holy place were the nation Israel. So, apparently, He is talking to them. We are not looking for the abomination of desolation. To tell you

the truth, friend, I wouldn't even know an abomination of desolation if I met one on the street! Thank God, I am not looking for that; I am looking for Christ. There is a lot of difference between looking for Him and looking for an abomination!

There is another distinction that we should properly make. Paul called it to our attention:

Give no offense, neither to the Jews, nor to the Greeks
[Gentiles], *nor to the church of God.* (1 Corinthians
10:32)

This is the threefold division of the human family according to the Word of God: Jews, Gentiles, and the church.

Then in the Book of Revelation, there is a marvelous division given. (Whenever I teach this last book of the Bible, I keep in mind that it is not a hodge-podge, it is not a conglomerate of confusion, but it is the giving of the orderly steps by which Jesus Christ is going to become the Ruler of this little earth on which we live. It deals with the past, the present, and the future. They all are included in that wonderful book.) We are told in Revelation that before the great day of wrath comes, before the Great Tribulation breaks in all its fury on this earth, two companies are sealed. One is a company of 144,000 Israelites (Revelation 7:4); it is this group that Scripture recognizes with "give no offense, neither to the *Jews*...." Then there is a great company of Gentiles who are sealed – "a great multitude, which no man could number" (Revelation 7:9). So two divisions of the human family are sealed: Jews and Gentiles.

But what about the third division, the church of God? We find no mention here that they are sealed, and it would be frightful indeed if the church went through the Great Tribulation without being sealed. It would be bad enough to go through it sealed, but

it would be tragic to go through it without some sort of protection. Remember that Christ in the Great Tribulation is no longer in the place of intercession; He is now the Judge of all the earth. He is directing those events that will finally bring Him to the earth to assume power. The poor church – if it were in the world – is left out and would not be sealed during this period. Let me ask you, why wasn't the church sealed? Well, the church is already *with Him* in the New Jerusalem! This is something to note.

Also, we need to observe that at the Rapture there is no angel ministry. This may seem like a very unimportant detail, but it is noticeable.

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first.

(1 Thessalonians 4:16)

A common viewpoint is that we have a trio here who will join their voices together to bring in the Rapture – that the Lord will descend with a shout, but He will need a little help, so there is the voice of the archangel and Gabriel blowing a trumpet. To me that is utterly ridiculous and preposterous. The Lord's voice is the voice of the archangel in its majesty, dignity, and authority. He is not going to need any archangel to help Him raise the dead and call His church to be with Him! I don't mean to be ridiculous, but can you imagine at the grave of Lazarus that the Lord Jesus would call Gabriel to help him raise Lazarus from the dead? Do you think Jesus, the second person of the Godhead, the one who is God Himself, would need any help? Neither will He need the angel Gabriel to blow a horn. His voice is *like* that of an archangel and it is *like* the sound of a trumpet. The Greek text is very clear on this point. This is also illustrated for us in John's vision on the Isle of Patmos when he said, "I...heard behind me a great voice,

as of a trumpet...and I turned to see the voice that spoke with me” (Revelation 1:10, 12). Whom did he see? He did not see Gabriel blowing a trumpet. He saw the glorified Christ. Now, my friend, what you have at the Rapture is the Lord Jesus coming Himself to get His church, His bride. I don’t know how that affects you, but it affects me a great deal. He will not send an angel to get us; He will come for us Himself!

However, at the Revelation there *is* an angel ministry. It is mentioned in the Olivet Discourse where it belongs:

And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. (Matthew 24:30, 31)

When He returns to the earth to establish His kingdom, He sends out His angels. Angels had ministered in the Old Testament to the Israelites, and the Law was given by the ministry of angels (see Acts 7:53). So here at the end, God sends His angels to gather those who will enter into the kingdom. It has nothing to do with the Rapture, you see. It is altogether different from that.

Now at the *Rapture* the church is raised, and those in Christ – whether they be the living or the dead in Christ – are changed, and they enter the New Jerusalem. While at the *Revelation*, the Old Testament saints and the Great Tribulation saints are raised to enter the kingdom. The time is different. We need to recognize that. We are told in Matthew’s record:

*Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand,
Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom
prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*
(Matthew 25:34)

They are to enter into the kingdom here upon this earth, and the Great Tribulation saints are going to be included.

In the Book of Revelation John records:

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them; and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and who had not worshiped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (Revelation 20:4)

Where did they reign? Well, here on this earth.

But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection; on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years. (Revelation 20:5, 6)

This is a very important passage of Scripture, you see. It shows again that the Rapture and the Revelation are quite different.

Also, there is a symbol we need to note. When the Rapture is mentioned, when He is talking about His church, He depicts Himself not only as the offspring of David but also as the “bright and morning star.”

I, Jesus, have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star. (Revelation 22:16)

Now when He is speaking to Israel, the symbol is altogether different.

But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up like calves of the stall. (Malachi 4:2)

To the church He is the “bright and morning star.” To Israel and the Gentile world during the Great Tribulation, He will be the “Sun of righteousness.”

In our world today, the morning star appears shortly before the sun comes up. I say shortly before, but sometimes it is quite awhile before the sun comes up. Years ago, riding on the Super Chief train from Los Angeles to Chicago, I was awakened in the morning by a flood of light around the curtain of my roomette. I raised the curtain to see what it was – I thought the sun was coming up. But it wasn't the sun; it was the bright and morning star that had come up. Believe me, it was bright! I assumed that the sun would be coming along in the next few minutes, but it did not. It was awhile before the sun appeared. I thought at the time that Christ to the church is the Bright and Morning Star who might appear at any time.

When He appears as the Bright and Morning Star, signs will begin to take place that will bring the Sun of Righteousness to the new day that will be on this earth. That is the picture and figure He was giving when He mentioned the fact that the Old Testament saints are to be raised at the end of the Great Tribulation Period together with the Tribulation saints. This brings to an end the first resurrection – that is, the resurrection of the saved.

This concludes all of them: Christ the firstfruits and those that are Christ's at His coming. Then we are told that at the end of the Millennium the unsaved are to be raised for the Great White Throne judgment. So, you see, the naive idea that there will be a general judgment day when all the dead will be raised – the good being put on one side and the bad on the other – does not fit Scripture. God does everything decently and in order. He has a system and program that He generally follows, and He is certainly following it here.

Attitude

The attitude at the Rapture is different from that at the Revelation because there are certain psychological factors that are altogether opposite.

At the Rapture, there is deliverance. It is a time of great joy, which the believer anticipates. This is suggested in the following verse:

After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven [John, as a representative of the church, was called up]; *and the first voice that I heard was, as it were, of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up here* [the Lord Jesus calling His own], *and I will show thee things which must be hereafter.* (Revelation 4:1)

He doesn't say, "Come up here; I'm going to push you into the Great Tribulation – you need a little purifying." Of course the church needs purifying, but, my friend, the blood of Jesus Christ is what cleanses us from all sin. You could stick me in a furnace for eternity and I don't think you would change this old nature of mine at all. What I need is mercy.

Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. (Jude 21)

One of the wonderful things we can do in this day of apostasy is to look for the *mercy* of our Lord Jesus Christ – it is what saved me. If God had not extended His mercy to me, I would not be saved. My friend, God’s mercy is extended to me every day. Oh, how merciful He has been to me! And at the Rapture I am going out with the rest of you super-duper saints. Do you know why? Because of the mercy of God. He saved me by grace, He keeps me by His grace, and He is going to take me out at the Rapture by His grace. So I am looking for mercy. I hope you don’t mind, because I *need* it. And maybe you need it also.

Now listen to this:

For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, who delivered us from the wrath to come. (1 Thessalonians 1:9, 10)

The wrath to come described in the Old Testament is that great day of God’s wrath, the Great Tribulation Period. Paul, writing to the Thessalonian believers, says God has delivered us from the wrath to come and that we are to wait for His Son. Oh, what a comfortable, glorious feeling that gives!

There are those folk who say the church needs the Great Tribulation to purify it. Well, I agree that the church needs purifying. There is no question about that. But I have serious doubts that the Great Tribulation could purify us enough to enter into the presence of the Lord.

Also, these folk who say the church is to go through the Great Tribulation accuse us of looking for an escape mechanism. Friends, do you know that is absolutely accurate? Although I get a little

tired of hearing it, I appreciate the plane stewardess going through that little ritual of demonstrating what to do in case of emergency. If something happens to the plane at high altitude, an oxygen mask will drop down. And in case the plane goes down in water, there will be boats and life preservers. I feel it is a good thing to be prepared. I always have looked for an escape mechanism. In the past few years, I have had five major operations. I am a coward, and I don't like to go to a hospital. If there had been any way to escape, I would have. And I thank God today that there is an escape mechanism from the Great Tribulation Period! I do not know about these brave ones who want to go through it. I think at the Rapture they will be going out with me – and they will be tickled to death that they missed the Tribulation. Let's not mind saying that. Paul said to a young preacher:

Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ. (Titus 2:13)

What a glorious anticipation it is!

Paul, giving to the Roman believers the benefits of justification by faith, mentions eight of them. The seventh one is this:

Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. (Romans 5:9)

What kind of wrath? Well, the only wrath that is coming is the great day of His wrath. It is mentioned again and again in the Book of Revelation, and it is what the Old Testament prophets had talked about. Imagine, friend, the joy believers will experience at the time of the Rapture – delivered! Delivered from wrath!

But at the time of the Revelation of Christ, the attitude will be entirely different.

Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. (Psalm 2:9)

I'm not looking for one who is going to treat me like that! This describes the Lord Jesus coming to this earth to put down rebellion. If you can think of a better way He could do it, then you suggest it to Him. Apparently even the infinite God was not able to come up with anything different from this. He intends to punish sinners and put down the rebellion on this earth. He intends to take the scepter of this universe. This is God's plan and purpose.

Now notice the attitude on earth when He comes in that role:

Behold, he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they also who pierced him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.

(Revelation 1:7)

They are wailing because of His coming. You can see how different the attitude is from the attitude toward the Rapture.

And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. (Matthew 24:30)

This is not speaking of the Rapture when He comes to take His church, His bride. Did you ever see a bride who went down to the altar crying? No, they go down smiling, my friend. If they do weep – and sometimes women do weep regardless of the way a situation goes – they are weeping for joy. But here folk are mourning! This is something altogether different from the Rapture of the church.

We are given the order of procedure in the Book of Daniel:

And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince who standeth for the children of thy people, and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time; and at that time thy people

shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. (Daniel 12:1)

He tells us that there is first to be a time of trouble followed by the resurrection of the Old Testament saints.

For the Rapture we are told to *wait*. For the Revelation the emphasis is upon the word *watch*. I don't mean to split hairs here, but the attitude is different. There is a different way to wait and watch. There are seventeen words in the Old Testament translated by the English words "watch" and "wait." They don't mean the same things; though we may use the same word in English, it means something altogether different.

For instance, imagine a man who goes deer hunting every year. He and his friend get up early at the beginning of deer season and drive to their favorite spot. The next morning after they have camped all night, our man sits down on a certain stump and waits for the deer to come by, because in former years they have passed this spot. He is watching, perhaps for several hours. At every movement out yonder in the bushes, he stands up and lifts his gun. And the Lord have mercy on any hunter who comes through the bushes, because our man is trigger-happy! That is one way of watching.

But we see this man a month later, standing downtown on the corner of Broadway and First. He is looking this way and that way. You can see he is watching for somebody. You go up to him and say, "Who are you waiting for, friend?" He says, "My wife. She's forty-five minutes late, and I'm getting tired." Frankly this is different from watching for the deer – this is a different kind of *dear* he is looking for. He is waiting and watching, but his attitude is altogether different.

Then you go with him just a week later to the hospital. He and his wife are sitting there at a bedside next to their child. The

doctor says the little one will pass a crisis about midnight, and they are waiting and watching. Now that is another way to wait and watch, is it not?

Friend, for the child of God, the Rapture is something for which we wait in happy anticipation. But the opposite awaits the unsaved – for them there is nothing but wrath ahead; nothing but judgment is coming. It is altogether different.

As we have looked at the Rapture and at the Revelation of Jesus Christ, we have seen many contrasts. We have seen that the *action* is different. We have seen that the *attitude* toward each is different. Now we shall see that in the *anticipation* of each event there is a vast difference.

Anticipation

At the Revelation of Jesus Christ, Israel will be back in their land, having returned not for the Millennium but for the Great Tribulation Period. Even today they could be put out of that land again. The signs will take place during the Tribulation, and the anticipation will be for the Great Tribulation to be over.

However, for the Rapture there are no signs. Oh, the church would enter the apostasy, I grant that. And John did say that before the Antichrist would come, there would be many antichrists. Paul said to young Timothy that there would be a falling away:

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly that, in the latter times, some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving by them who believe and know the truth. (1 Timothy 4:1-3)

We are presently living in days of apostasy. One so-called theologian, who years ago espoused the “God is dead” movement, described himself as a Christian atheist! My friend, that is quite a twist. How can one be a *Christian* atheist? Of course it is a contradiction of terms. It is utterly preposterous, and it shows how far we are into the apostasy.

But our hope today is not fixed, actually, upon the church. Our present hope is fixed on the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. At the time of the Revelation of Christ, there will be signs and they are not good. They are signs of the coming of the terrible day of God’s wrath. It is an anticipation of dread. But we today are not looking for signs; we are looking for Him. This is the thing that Paul dealt with when he wrote to the believers in Thessalonica. You see, folk in the early church were looking for the Lord to come back in their lifetime. And when some of their loved ones died, they wondered if they had missed the Rapture. Paul, in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17, assured them that they had not missed the Rapture. In fact, they are going to be raised first. Then the living will be caught up after them, and together they will meet the Lord in the air. “And so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17). So the early believers called their cemetery where they buried their loved ones the *koimeterion*. We get our word “cemetery” from this Greek word, but it didn’t mean that then. A *koimeterion* was an inn where people came and spent the night. It was a *koimeterion* in Bethlehem that didn’t have room for Mary and Joseph the night Jesus was born. So, you see, the thought of the folk in the early church was, *We are just putting our loved ones up for the night – until the day breaks*. Oh, my friend, after all, most of the church has already missed the Great Tribulation. They have already gone through the doorway of death. They are already in the presence of Christ. And those who

are alive – the few that are left – are just going to bring up the end of the parade.

Death today means something entirely different for a believer than what it means for the unbeliever. For us, death means that the body is put in the grave, it is put to sleep – it is only the *body* that can be put to sleep. And that sleeping body is placed in the *koimeterion* (we call them today Holiday Inns or Hilton Hotels). It is just a temporary resting place, because the day is coming when those bodies are going to be raised from the grave.

Way back in the 1940s when I was a pastor in Pasadena, California, there was a wonderful couple in the church who celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary. At the dinner that evening he did the loveliest thing any man can do who has been married to a woman for fifty years. He reached over, patted her on the hand, and said to the group, “We are still on our honeymoon.” Friend, you can’t say anything nicer than that! In fact, that night going home, I said to my wife, “What in the world happened to our honeymoon?” Well, it wasn’t long after that when the man died. At the funeral, a great company of friends came and filed by the casket with tears in their eyes. He was much loved. Then the time came for his widow to approach him. She came up to the casket where he was, reached down and patted him on the hand just as he had patted hers, bent down and kissed his forehead, and she said, “John, I’ll see you in the morning.” And she will. It will be some bright morning, but she is going to see him. She just put him in the *koimeterion* temporarily. The cemetery is only a place where you put your loved ones for a little while.

We are looking for a great event – the Rapture, when we are going to see Christ. It means He is going to take us to be with Himself – to that place He has prepared for us.

My friend, that is the hope of the believer today. What is your hope for the future? If you have no hope for the future, you can look back to the past, to an historical event that took place nearly two thousand years ago when Christ died on the cross for you and me who are sinners. And you can trust Him as your Savior. Then you can turn your face to the sunrise, because the Bright and Morning Star is going to appear one of these days. When that action happens, may your attitude and anticipation be that of a believer!