

THE RAPTURE

Part 3: Secret & Imminent, or Will We KNOW?

(preached 12/24/23)

Please turn to *1 Thessalonians 5:1-8, Matthew 24:29-36*.

Sermon #1: What Is It?

- The Rapture is the Resurrection of the saints—the one Jesus and Paul talked extensively about.
- While the word “rapture” doesn’t appear in the Bible, the Greek word for it means “snatch/catch away, pluck violently” denoting harvest and rescue.
- It’s our reward and destination.
- Upon death, all who know Jesus will ascend as spirits up to Heaven and wait.
- The day will come when Jesus comes back to earth, and the dead in Christ will follow Him.
- Angels will accompany Him as well.
- Those in Christ who are still alive will be “harvested” by the angels and brought to the skies above Jerusalem, where they will meet up with Jesus and the dead in Christ.
- We’re told to encourage one another about this event and so we should!

Sermon #2: When? Past, Present, or Future?

- Gateway believes in a pre-millennial futurist fulfillment of the end times, including the Rapture.
- Pre-Millennial: the 1000 year reign of Christ is a real, physical event that takes place soon after the 2nd Coming where Jesus and His saints will reign on earth for 1000 years.
- The Tribulation: also known as Daniel’s 70th week, which is the last 7 years before Christ returns where the Antichrist makes himself known, and most of the events of Revelation chapter 6-19 take place.
- The first 69 weeks were fulfilled from the moment King Artaxerxes gave the command to rebuild Jerusalem and ended with the crucifixion and death of Christ.
- The final 7 years were not fulfilled immediately after: no 7 year covenant, no breaking of the covenant at the mid-point, no defiling of the Temple. There is also no evidence that all these things happened in 70 AD either.
- We’re still waiting for all these things to happen!

TODAY I’ll get more specific in timing and I’ll start by categorically ***rejecting that the Rapture is both imminent and secret at the same time.***

I pose to you that God will give **signs and portents** that only believers will discern so that we can ballpark the Rapture and truly KNOW when its imminent.

Let's start with a series of questions based on **NOAH, HIS FAMILY, AND THE FLOOD** which has been compared to the Rapture many times in the following way: the flood reps God's wrath, but the righteous are caught up and kept safe above the wrath, then brought back to start a brave new world:

- Did Noah and his family know the flood was coming in general?
- Did they know the exact day and hour?
- Was there any way for Noah & his family to ballpark the event?
- Let's narrow it down further: *was there any way for Noah & his family to know when it was near, even knocking at their door?*

The Lord commanded Noah to build the ark and the thing was massive: **as big as a shopping mall!** My family went into the Ark Encounter built in KY which was built to the Biblical blueprints—it was huge. Noah did it with primitive tools!

- Did all knowing God know ahead of time how long it would take Noah to build?

WE'RE TRYING TO BALLPARK THE FLOOD:

- God wouldn't have sent the flood before the Ark was ready, agreed?
- After the Ark is done, the next part of God's command & prophecy needs to happen: the animals need to get on.
- Would God send the flood before all the animals get on?

After all the animals get on, God then tells Noah: "*now you and yours get on it too and shut the door.*" God then says He's going to send rain 7 days after Noah shuts the Ark door, and that said rain will last 40 days. Up until that point there had never been rain.

When Noah & family first saw dark storm clouds filling the sky, possibly thunder, *is that a SIGN that it's about to rain?*

Would it be both reasonable and FAITHFUL for them to say "the flood is imminent!"?

I say "faithful" because to believing in God's prophetic promises is always counted as faith and highly commended by the Lord. He loves to tell His people about things ahead of time and give us the chance to believe Him.

Sure enough, *the rain began to fall* and "the fountains of the deep" opened up and spewed the millions of gallons of water from underground and the flood began.

Now let's take stock:

- NOAH was spared from God's wrath because God declared him righteous—he was a believer.
- Because he's a believer, God TELLS him what's coming—shares PROPHECY with him.
- Just before the actual prophesied event—the flood—God gave SIGNS and PORTENTS that the flood is coming.
- When Noah & family SEE said signs and portents, they know the flood is near, even at their Ark door. They're watchful, ready, and prepared. They may not have known the day or hour, but they certainly knew it was about to happen.
- IMMINENCY is in the Bible, but the Lord provides clues so that His people are awake, watchful, and expectant.

The only people who were taken by surprise were the unbelievers, who were of dark and not light.

- If the Rapture can happen before the end of this sentence then it's both secret and imminent at the same time.
- If the Rapture can happen before the end of this sentence, then it will take both believers and unbelievers by surprise...like a thief in the night.
- God is a revealer to those who believe, not a concealer. Secrecy means that even believers are clueless and therefore unprepared.

On the flip side, **if the Lord sends certain signs and portents ahead of time**, all believers will know and have the opportunity to *make sure their oil lamps are full when the Bridegroom calls out*. We may not know the exact day and hour that the Lord descends from Heaven with a shout, but we'll be able to actually obey what Jesus said: **to be awake, sober, and watching.**

The only people who will be blind to signs and portents are unbelievers, who walk in the darkness of not just sin: but blind ignorance.

The pattern of God since the very beginning is *tell His kids what's going on before it happens*, especially with big events...and the resurrection of the saints will be one of the biggest events this world has ever seen.

SECRECY = DARKNESS. It would be both cruel and unusual for God to send it secretly so that His children had no clue.

ALL THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN JESUS ARE CALLED “CHILDREN OF THE LIGHT.”

[Eph 5:8 ESV] for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.

Please remember that **Paul's 1st letter to the Thessalonians was about the Rapture**. Specifically, chapter 4 of said letter contains the famous verses we've already covered in this series: The Lord descends from Heaven with a shout, etc. Here is part of the chapter which immediately follows, chapter 5:

[1Th 5:1-8 ESV] 1 Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. 2 For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3 While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. 4 But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. 5 For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. 6 So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. 8 But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.

Let's unpack! First, Paul is talking about the Rapture. *He's not referring to some other event, nor is he talking about 2 stages of the same events.*

- **Verses 2-3:** the rapture only comes as a surprise to UNBELIEVERS who think all is well.
- Strangely, it isn't just the rapture that takes them by surprise but **“destruction”** that they do NOT escape from...similar to Noah's Flood. We'll come back to that if there's time.
- In other words, the day of the resurrection is also the day that some sort of destruction happens to unbelievers.
- Let's reread verse 4 so that we can dispense that the Rapture will be a secret event that could happen by the end of this sentence:

4 But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief.

Paul goes on to explain that **we are of the Light**, and therefore walk in both righteousness and knowledge.

In verses 6-8 he uses the same words Jesus did to describe this day: ***believers will be awake and sober and here's why: we will KNOW when it's near, even knocking at our door.***

Imagine the following: the weather people say that **a blizzard is coming** and that it will bring up to 5 ft of snow. They estimate it will get here in 5 days time, give or take. YOU and your friend Johnny hear the same report.

What do you do BEFOREHAND? Buy TP, groceries, and leave your faucets dripping so the pipes don't freeze. You get your snow shovels ready, make sure you've got lots of firewood, coal, pellets, or propane if you heat that way. ***Johnny does nothing because he just doesn't believe the weatherman and thinks it won't be a big deal.***

Weatherman says it should start after dark. You check the Doppler radar on your phone and see a massive blue front coming in...sometime after it gets dark. You don't drink any booze and you don't fall asleep and here's why: you've decided to stay awake and watch for its approach. Sure enough, the wind begins to blow, the stars are blotted out by the clouds, and the flurries begin...it's near! Even at your door! You're awake, sober, and watch as the flurries turn into a raging snowfall—the blizzard has arrived and you're ready.

Johnny calls you the next morning all stressed out. He downed a bottle of Captain Jack Daniels last night and passed out. He woke up to 5 ft of snow and can't even leave his house. He's got no supplies, TP running low, and his pipes froze. He was caught by surprise and sudden destruction came upon him. ***You weren't.***

Verses 5-6 tell us that believers will KNOW to stay awake and not get drunk because the ultimate Weatherman, God, told us this event was incoming. We saw the signs and portents of it and were able to narrow it down to a short enough period where we would know to stay up and wait for the trumpet to sound.

Let's get real honest right now Church: ***if the Rapture happens today or tomorrow, none of us will be ready.*** We'll be just as surprised as the unbelievers, even if the outcome is better for us.

It's IMPOSSIBLE to live with a constant sense of imminency that goes on for years and decades. Every believer goes through tough patches where they backslide—aka “fall asleep” or “get drunk.”

No my fellow saints: **our Heavenly Father will make sure we know His narrow window of time when this glorious event will take place.** We are His children who walk in the Light, not the dark that this day should come upon us like a thief.

Most who've studied the Rapture are aware of **THE FAMOUS VERSE ABOUT ITS TIMING:**

[Mat 24:36 ESV] "But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only."

Everyone who supports every timing agrees this refers to the Rapture: Pre-Trib, Mid-Trib, Pre-Wrath, and Post-Trib Christians unite on this.

Context in the Bible is king. Here the verses that lead up to this famous verse:

[Mat 24:29-36 ESV] 29 "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 30 Then will appear in heaven the Sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. 31 And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. 32 "From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. 33 So also, when YOU SEE all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. 34 Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. 35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. 36 "But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.

The "elect" are all believers who are alive and remain on the planet—both Jews and Gentiles. They're not just Israel. The dead in Christ are already with the Lord, in the air.

THE TRIBES OF THE EARTH (UNBELIEVERS) WILL MOURN because, as Paul also said, this will be a day that 1) took them by surprise and 2) is a day of destruction for them.

For believers we're given signs that PRECEDE the event, hence verse 32: the fig tree. Since fig trees aren't common over here, let's use the Maple or Oak.

- When the branches have grown leaves, and the leaves are full sized, we KNOW that summer is near.
- When they begin to turn red, orange, or yellow, we KNOW that Fall is near.

VERSE 33: when YOU—meaning all those on the planet at that time who believe—see “these things” which are all the things Jesus mentioned in Matthew 24—then we know the Lord's return is near, even at the very door/gate! The generation which is alive and on earth at that time will not die out until all those things (Matthew 24) take place.

Now comes the famous verse 36 which we cannot take out of context! Speaking of ALL the events of Matthew 24, we cannot know the day and hour. In other words, if we claim the Rapture could happen right now and in secret, then none of the events of Matthew 24 apply to it including “no one knows the day or hour.” A secret imminent rapture that could happen right now is in direct contradiction to the testimony of Jesus and Paul in the Bible.

We can [and will] have imminency without secrecy.

Where it does come to play is when the events of Matthew 24 have fully taken place, which doesn't happen until the Tribulation starts.

Any believers still alive and on the planet only need see/read the signs and portents the Lord has given and, when they're all fulfilled, will know that Rapture could happen any day/hour/minute!

Just as Noah and his family did back in the day.

Luke 21 is the same account as Matthew 24, but told from Luke's point of view. Look what Jesus says:

[Luk 21:25-33 ESV] 25 "And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, 26 people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 27 And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. 28 Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise

your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." 29 And he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. 30 As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. 31 So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. 32 Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. 33 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

Verse 25: there will be signs...and only the unbelievers will be fainting with fear because even part of them senses their destruction is at hand.

Verse 28: when believers see these things, look up! Our redemption draws near. The Kingdom of God is coming!

"Scott, are you trying to say the Rapture is Post-Tribulation?!" I'll get more into that next Sunday but I firmly believe the Church will have to endure some of the Tribulation.

I want to be wrong and I'll make you a deal, if you disagree with me by the end of this sermon series. If the Rapture happens way before all these events then, as the angels are scooping us up and whisking us to the skies above Jerusalem, I'll ask the angel carrying me to bring me near all of you. I will shout "I was wrong!" and I'll do so while whooping with joy!!!!!!!!!!!!!! If you respond "yeah, you were!" I won't be insulted at all. Promise! I'll be so happy that you could spit at me and I would still shout "hallelujah!"

BUT IF YOU'RE WRONG I'LL MAKE YOU THIS PROMISE: I won't come to you and say "told ya...but you wouldn't listen!" It'll still be tough, because we'll still be in these bodies and in this fallen world...with some tough things to look forward to.

You know what though? We'll do as Jesus said: **endure to the end and be saved.**

- We'll read our Bible KNOWING what comes next and KNOWING that our Lord has promised to see us through all of it, no matter what.
- We won't lose faith or hope, but instead will know that the final countdown to our resurrection has started!
- That things end up with the victorious return of our Lord Jesus!!!
- We'll live through the trouble then just like we do now: standing on the prophetic promises of God vs circumstances!

MERRY CHRISTMAS!