

# THE RAPTURE

## *Part 1: What is it?*

(preached 12/10/23)

Please turn to *1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, 1 Corinthians 15:35-55, Revelation 21:3-5*

***Every time something big happens in the world*** like a war, major natural disaster, celestial event, or pandemic, some Christians get excited and wonder if the Rapture is about to happen. Before I go any further, I want to make a few points:

- **I don't know everything.** While I know the Bible has provided definitive answers about the Rapture, I also know there are several things I'm missing and questions I have that remain unanswered. Therefore you might have some questions and the response you get from me is a shrug.
- **I'm not certain when it's going to happen.** Although I lean in a certain direction which I will share in this series, I'm not dogmatic about it and won't insist that you agree with me.
- **Be open to what I share if it challenges your timing.** If you're dogmatic about a timing, all I ask you do is listen to what I'm going to share and be open minded about it. I promise I will do my best to stick with a purely exegetical approach to Scripture. I don't have a bias invested in this.
- **I've read books and listened to sermons from all timings.** I've done my best to give them all a fair examination.
- **TODAY we're only talking about what the Rapture is.** We'll address timing next week.

MY STORY. I grew up in the Catholic Church where the word "rapture" was never used, and then I left that church when I was a teen. 10 years later I start dating Becky Stuart (who is now my wife) who grew up in an evangelical church and she told me that, when she was a kid, her church showed her a movie called "*Thief in the Night*." Said movie taught the rapture was "imminent" and that unbelievers would be left behind, not knowing what happened. From that point on, if she went outside and didn't see anyone she would be afraid she missed it! That she'd been left behind.

She would often tell me these stories and ***I pretended to understand***...when in fact I didn't. I didn't know what she meant by "the rapture." Not wanting to appear ignorant, I just nodded my head whenever she would bring it up.

Soon after we were married I was in **Sam's Club** and saw a book titled "**Left Behind.**" When I read the book jacket to see what it was about, I got her attention. "Hey!" I said to her, "someone wrote a book about your greatest fear!" She actually didn't seem to interested in reading it...so I bought it.

**I couldn't believe what I was reading.** I was newly Saved and, as I read, I would run to my Bible and read the verses. I was excited as a kid on Christmas morning! I would go to Becky and say things like *“did you know that, when Jesus comes back, a trumpet is going to blow? Did you know that we actually meet Him up in the sky? Did you know that if we're still alive, we'll be 'transformed' into a resurrected body? That this new body will shine with God's glory, be indestructible, and live forever?”*

She would look at me and say *“yes, I knew all that. What do you think I've been talking about this whole time? I thought you knew what the Rapture was?”* I had to admit I didn't.

**Let's start off today defining what the Rapture is.** First, you won't find the word “rapture” in the Bible which tends to confuse some people, but not to fear! It's based on a Greek verb *harpazo* which translates to *“caught up/snatched away, plucked out by force.”* Don't take the phrase “by force” to mean something negative, but quite the opposite. Here are a few examples:

- Picking/plucking a flower or vegetable—denoting a harvest.
- Cutting the Christmas Tree of your choice to beautify your home.
- Your child is about to fall or be hit by something, and you snatch them out of harm's way.

**So the Rapture will be our wonderful Lord Jesus snatching us away as both a harvest AND a rescue!**

Here is what Paul told the Thessalonians:

**[1Th 4:13-18 ESV]** 13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. 14 For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. 15 For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Let's unpack this.

13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.

VERSE 13: Paul separates believers from unbelievers and the latter have no hope when life is over. There's a place called Hell, it's real and not symbolic, and anyone who continues to reject Jesus as their Savior will end up there.

**THE DEATH OF OUR LOVED ONES IS HARD** to endure and comes with sorrow...but for the believer it's NOT the end of the story! It's not eternal separation! Paul is telling the believers at Thessalonica to be INFORMED—that something different awaits all those who put their trust in Jesus Christ. He's about to reveal that some “event” will take place in the future that all believers participate in and he gives the details.

14 For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.

VERSE 14: a resurrection is going to take place! Jesus went first: He died and rose from the dead on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day. Paul uses our Lord as our example because Christ is our Good Shephard and we get to follow Him! In the here and now we follow Him by picking up our crosses and carrying them. But in the future we follow Him into a new glorified immortal body!!!

Let's be INFORMED just as the Thessalonians were: ***our eternal reward isn't to die and then ascend to heaven as spirits.*** That's not taught anywhere in the Bible and isn't what we pray when we recite the Lord's Prayer.

## **OUR GOAL IS THE RESURRECTION!**

**Our path is to follow Jesus.** He died on the Cross in His first coming, so we too crucify our flesh here in this body. He went to the spirit world for 3 days after He died, and so will our spirit ascend to heaven after we die. He rose from the dead and walked the earth on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, and so will we!

VERSE 14 (THE LATTER HALF) tells us:

God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.

## **The spirits of all our loved ones in Christ are in heaven right**

**now.** My dad is there, my stepmother Barb, and my sister Melody all of whom came to know Jesus as their Savior. Heaven ***is a temporary rest area*** along the highway we're following Jesus on. The spirits of our loved ones will follow Jesus down from Heaven into the sky above the earth!

Have you ever tried to picture what our loved ones in heaven are “doing”? Sitting on clouds playing harps? LOL. My opinion is that “time” works a lot differently there...it’s not linear “moment by moment/hour by hour” like here. All the beings in heaven are like the Lord: no longer subject to linear time.

That being said, **they’re waiting for Jesus to give the “go” signal.** They will follow Jesus wherever and whenever He goes, just like we should. A moment will come when all the human and some angelic spirits in heaven will see Jesus leaving and they will follow! He will journey down to earth’s sky and....

15 For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.

VERSE 15. The spirits who followed Jesus down from heaven get to go first. Then any believer whose still alive goes second. In what? Being resurrected!

16 For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

VERSE 16. 3 things happen when Jesus descends from heaven. 1) a cry/shout of command. 2) An archangel speaks. 3) There’s a blast of a trumpet.

CRY/SHOUT OF COMMAND. While Paul doesn’t reveal what Jesus will say, there’s a really good chance that He’ll shout **“come up here!”** as He does 3 other places in the Bible. In ancient times when a king or some other authority figure calls you up to the front to receive a promotion, he would say “come up here!” In *Revelation 4:1* John sees a door up in the sky which leads to Heaven, and Jesus shouts “come up here!” and later on in *Revelation 11:12* when the 2 Witnesses are resurrected from the dead, Jesus again shouts “come up here!” at which time they ascend to Heaven.

**Therefore our Lord and Savior Jesus, the King of all kings and Lord of all lords, will descend from Heaven and hover in the skies, shouting “come up here!”**

**Our long awaited reward, the resurrection from the dead, is finally given! Our promotion will be at hand!**

THE VOICE OF AN ARCHANGEL. Some have mistaken this part to mean that Jesus will speak like an angel but that's not true: ***He is above the angels!*** He would have no need to imitate them in any way. No, just as our Lord stated in the Gospels, **angels will accompany Him when He returns:**

***[Mat 25:31 ESV]*** 31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, **and all the angels with him**, then he will sit on his glorious throne."

In *Revelation 12*, Michael and the army of angels descend from heaven first to fight with the Dragon and His angels. Michael and the good angels win, casting Satan and his rebels to earth. With the way clear, Michael and the good angels escort King Jesus and the spirits of the believers to the skies above Jerusalem! The voice of the archangel that will speak will likely be Michael. What's he going to say? No idea. We'll just wait and see!

THE TRUMPET BLAST. The sound of the trumpet is a rallying call, a command to gather together in one place. During a battle, the sound of the trumpet would call all the troops to rally next to it. In ancient Judea, the priests of the Temple would blow the trumpet for all the Israelites to gather at the Temple.

When the last trumpet is finally blown, **it will be a call for everyone to gather in Jerusalem!**

Consider this: ***if we're still alive and living in the USA when the rapture happens, WHERE are we meeting Jesus in the air?*** Certainly not in the skies above NY!

THE SKIES OF ISRAEL. No fellow saints: we'll hear the shout of Jesus, the voice of Michael the archangel, then the blast of a trumpet, and we'll gather over the skies of Israel! Jesus spoke of this event:

***[Mat 24:31 ESV]*** "And he [Jesus] 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."

Earlier in this sermon I told you that the Greek word for rapture—harpazo—means to **PLUCK** or **HARVEST**.

**We are Christ's harvest! His wheat!**

17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.

If we're still alive and here when the rapture happens, **WE WILL KNOW BEFORE IT HAPPENS** by seeing Jesus descend from heaven, hearing His shout of command, hearing the archangel Michael, and hearing the blast of the trumpet. We are children of the day and not the night.

**THE RAPTURE WILL NOT TAKE BELIEVERS BY SURPRISE.** It will NOT come "as a thief in the night" for the believer!

The *angels will be sent to gather us* and escort us to the skies over Jerusalem where Jesus and the spirits of the dead will be waiting for us.

**Our resurrection transformation will take place, maybe even "in the clouds!"**

What will the resurrection be like? Paul gives the details!

**[1Co 15:35-50 ESV]** 35 But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" 36 You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. 37 And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. 38 But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. 39 For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. 40 There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another. 41 There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. 42 So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is 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 Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. 46 But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. 47 The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. 48 As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. 49 Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. 50 I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

Right now we're in an **earthly body** made from the dust of the earth, descended from Adam & Eve.

- At the rapture we will fully cast off every tie to the earth and Adam!
- Our bodies will transform from dust to the stuff of heaven!
- Our bodies will only be tied to Father God and Jesus, made in His image!
- We will be immortal like Christ! Invulnerable like Jesus!
- Death will never never never have dominion over us ever again!

**We will never be separated from Jesus or each other, ever again!**

**Right now the most painful thing that death does is separate us.** I lost both my dad and stepmom last year, my older brother David 5 years ago, and my dog back in 2020. I was left with sorrow and loss, because death is a thief and no human can stop or overcome it.

**Thank God that Jesus isn't just human**, but He's also GOD! He overcame death! Death is the last enemy which is under His feet! Look at what Paul says next:

51 Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. 53 For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. 54 When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." 55 "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"

Paul is referring to the exact same event here in Corinthians as he was in 1 Thessalonians.

**The angels will escort us** from here in NY to the skies over Jerusalem where we'll see Jesus and our loved ones [who believed] waiting for us! Our loved ones will receive their resurrection first, then us! It will happen VERY quickly—in the twinkling of an eye!

***We'll hear the trumpet sound and then be changed!***

**We'll cast off this body and get one that matches Jesus'!**

**Death loses!!!**

**JESUS WINS!!!**

**BECAUSE JESUS WINS, WE WIN!!!**

On this wonderful day, my favorite verses in all the Bible will be fulfilled:

**[Rev 21:3-5 ESV]** 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." 5 And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

All the pain, sorrow, death, conflict, disease, war, and the other hardships of life will be over...FOREVER!