

THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH

BIBLE TEXT: Matthew 24:36-51; I Thessalonians 4:13-18; 5:1-8; Isaiah 26:20, 21

LESSON 164 Junior and Senior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "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 14:3).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Matthew 24:36-51

³⁶ But of that day and hour knoweth no *man*, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.

³⁷ But as the days of Noe *were*, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

³⁸ For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark,

³⁹ And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

⁴⁰ Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

⁴¹ *Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.*

⁴² Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.

⁴³ But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up.

⁴⁴ Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.

⁴⁵ Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom

BIBLE REFERENCES:

NOTES:

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"And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matthew 24 :36-39).

The Two Great Events

The general term, the "second coming of Christ," refers to two great events. The first is the Rapture of the Church, at which time Christ is seen only by those who are ready; they are caught up to meet Him in the air. The second event is the Revelation of Christ, when He comes back with His saints to set up His Kingdom on earth — the Millennium. Between the Rapture of the Church and the Revelation of Jesus Christ occurs the Marriage Supper of the Lamb in mid-air and the great Tribulation, or the time of Jacob's trouble, on the earth.

The Rapture of the Church is the catching away of the Bride of Christ — those who have made themselves ready — from this earth to the place in mid-air that Jesus has prepared for them, to be united with Him at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. Jesus said, "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). The very words of Jesus were: "I will come again."

Old Testament Types

The Rapture is clearly set forth in the Word of God in many different ways. It is set forth typically in the Old Testament. We are given to understand, through various types and shadows in the Scriptures, that it is not the will of God for the Church to go through the terrible judgments that will sweep this earth when God begins to execute His wrath upon the nations that have forgotten Him. We have it typified in Noah and the Flood. "Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God." Noah had "found grace in the eyes of the LORD" (Genesis 6:8, 9). He was a fitting type of the overcoming Church that will be taken out of the world at the Rapture. When God determined to visit judgment upon the earth, He commanded Noah to make an Ark. That Ark was constructed by Noah to take him up above the waters of judgment that were to sweep over the earth. All the righteous were saved in that Ark. "But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matthew 24:37). Just as Noah was protected from the waters of the Flood, so God will spare the righteous, overcoming people when His judgment is poured out upon the earth in the last days. Jesus will call them to meet Him in the air.

At another time we see the Rapture of the Church typified in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. When Abraham prayed for his nephew who was in Sodom, he asked the Lord, "Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?" (Genesis 18:23). The Lord spared Lot from

his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season?

⁴⁶ Blessed *is* that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.

⁴⁷ Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods.

⁴⁸ But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming;

⁴⁹ And shall begin to smite *his* fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken;

⁵⁰ The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for *him*, and in an hour that he is not aware of,

⁵¹ And shall cut him asunder, and appoint *him* his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

¹³ But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

¹⁴ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

¹⁵ For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive *and* remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

¹⁶ For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven

destruction and took him out in answer to the prayers of Abraham, his uncle. That typifies God's protection over His people when judgment falls upon the earth. "Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed" (Luke 17:28-30).

We also have the Rapture typified in Israel's deliverance during the time that the awful judgment of God was sweeping over Egypt. The destroyer could not touch the land of Goshen, where God's people dwelt. These things, along with many other familiar passages of Scripture bearing on the subject, show us that the Lord is going to take His people out of this world before the awful judgment breaks upon us.

Scriptures that Promise Escape

"Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast.

"For, behold, the LORD cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain" (Isaiah 26:20, 21).

In these two verses we have God pictured as He is calling His people away from the world before His judgment is poured out upon the earth during the awful Tribulation. Zephaniah exhorts us: "Seek ye the LORD all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD'S anger" (Zephaniah 2:3).

Signs of His Coming

The disciples asked, "What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" Part of the answer that Jesus gave was: "Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. . . . And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.... And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Matthew 24:3-14).

This century has seen two world wars, with famine and pestilence following, and still has no better solution to its problems than to prepare for the third world war. There have been four times as many killed by earthquakes already in the twentieth century as in the entire nineteenth century. Still the nineteenth century saw more earthquakes than all the combined eighteen centuries since Christ was on earth. New religions and false prophets are on the increase, but spirituality is in rapid decline. Parts of the Bible have been translated into 1090 different languages, and the Gospel has been preached in every nation in the world. The end is at hand! Perilous Times

Paul describes the last days as perilous times. "For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away" (II Timothy 3:2-5). This is such a complete and accurate description of men today that it needs little comment. In the newspapers we read of traitors, trucebreakers, and false accusers. Along the highways we see signs, "Dine and Dance," "Eat and Drink." The crowded theaters and pleasure resorts, when contrasted with the empty churches, show us that men are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. Police records,

with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

¹⁷ Then we which 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.

¹⁸ Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-8

¹ But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you.

² For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.

³ For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.

⁴ But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.

⁵ Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.

⁶ Therefore let us not sleep, as *do* others; but let us watch and be sober.

⁷ For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night.

⁸ But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of

accounts of divorce actions, and our own every-day observation show us disobedience to parents, lack of natural affection, and covetousness on every side. These are the last days! The coming of the Lord is at hand!

Warnings Unheeded

"For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.

"But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.

"Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.

"Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and *be* sober.

"For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night.

"But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation" (I Thessalonians 5:3-8).

In spite of the warnings given in the Bible and the prophecies that we can see being fulfilled before our eyes every day, the world will continue in its sinful ways until Jesus comes suddenly and takes His people from the earth. "For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matthew 24:27). It will come upon the world like the Flood in the days of Noah. Noah spent 120 years building the Ark and preparing a way of escape for himself and his family, and at the same time he preached the Gospel and warned the people of the approaching destruction. The people had the opportunity to prepare themselves, but they paid little heed to the warnings and went on in their own willful and sinful ways. "They were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe 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" (Matthew 24:38, 39). The people of the world have had ample warning concerning the coming of the Lord, but very few are making any preparation to meet Jesus when He comes. His coming will take the world unawares; it will be sudden upon all the earth.

Sudden Destruction

"For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them" (I Thessalonians 5:3). The sudden destruction will be the great Tribulation that bursts forth upon the world after the Bride of Christ has been taken out of the world. The watching saints — the full overcomers — will constitute the Bride of Christ. They are the ones who are looking for His coming. "Unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time" (Hebrews 9:28). It is only the Bride who will see Him. The unbelievers will awaken to the reality of His coming when they miss those who have been taken away. "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 24:40,41). There will be no time then to breathe a prayer or make any preparation. Perhaps the "other" will sleep on until daybreak, unmindful that the one by his side is gone.

At an Unexpected Time

"Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.

"But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up.

"Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think

salvation.

Isaiah 26:20-21

²⁰ Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast.

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"Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season?"

"Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.

"Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods.

"But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming;

"And shall begin to smite his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken;

"The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of,

"And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall *be* weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 24:42-51).

The Scripture is very plain concerning the fact that no man knows the day nor the hour of the coming of Jesus. "But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father" (Mark 13:32). In the face of such a clear declaration that no man — not even the Son of God — knows the day, nor the hour, it is difficult to see why anyone would attempt to set a date for the coming of Jesus or the end of the world. However, some people have set a date, contrary to the admonition and plain truth of the Scriptures. Their followers have been led to dispose of their possessions, and at the appointed time to put on white robes and go out upon a hill to await the coming of Jesus. This is not the way in which we are told to watch for His coming. The servants of God are instructed by Jesus to occupy until He comes. We are told that two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left. It matters not whether we are in the field, at the mill, or sleeping during the night, our hearts can be ever watchful and ready when the call goes forth, "Behold, the bridegroom cometh."

Preparation

Jesus said, "Behold, I come as a thief" (Revelation 16:15). "Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh" (Matthew 24:44). The parable of the ten virgins, Matthew 25:1-13, is given to warn us of the danger of carelessness concerning our preparation for the coming of the Lord. If we know what it takes to be a wise virgin and we have not made preparation, then the fault is all ours and we shall have to take the blame. If we are walking in all the light we have and have only come to the knowledge of justification, God will see us through. If we have been sanctified wholly and that truth is dwelling deep in our soul and we have had no further light on the Word of God, the Lord will see us through. But if we have been justified and sanctified and the light of the baptism of the Holy Ghost has fallen on our pathway and we have failed to put on the whole armor of God, our fate will be that of the foolish virgins. Even after receiving the baptism of the Holy Ghost it is necessary to continue to walk in the light in order to make the Rapture. "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" (Hebrews 2:3).

Virginitly in the parable represents purity of heart, or sanctification. The oil represents the Spirit of God. There is a measure of the Spirit of God received at salvation and at sanctification; but to take oil in the vessel with their lamps — that extra supply of oil — indicates that the wise virgins had the baptism of the Holy Ghost. The foolish virgins took no oil with them, indicating that they had neglected to receive the baptism of the Holy Ghost. The wise went in to the marriage; the foolish did not. Are you among the wise virgins, and by perseverance and determination have made yourself ready at any cost? "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him' for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath

made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints" (Revelation 19:7, 8).

Neglect

Those who are not full overcomers, who have not walked in all the light, will remain on the earth to suffer during the awful Tribulation and the reign of the Antichrist. To remain true then will mean being killed for the Gospel's sake. To weaken in that day will mean taking the mark of the beast and being eternally lost. "And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him . . . as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed" (Revelation 13:8, 15). If a man cannot stand now, while the Gospel is being preached and the children of God are here to lend encouragement, how can he expect to stand when the Bride of Christ has been taken out of the world? "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" (Jeremiah 12:5).

The Resurrection

"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

"For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

"For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

"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 which 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.

"Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (I Thessalonians 4:13-18).

The Rapture will include those full overcomers who are living at the time of the coming of Jesus and also all the full overcomers who have died in Christ. Those in the grave will be the first to hear the voice of the Lord, and shall rise first, but we who remain shall meet our Lord with them in the air. The dead will come forth with their glorified bodies and we who make the Rapture shall be instantly changed from these mortal bodies to an immortal or glorified body. "Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality" (I Corinthians 15:51-53). Not all the dead will rise at this time, but only the full overcomers who have died in Christ. The wicked dead will not be resurrected until after the Millennium. "But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished" (Revelation 20:5).

Every Christian should earnestly strive, like Paul, that "if by any means" he might attain unto the First Resurrection and escape the awful judgments of God upon the earth. "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 20:6).