

THE RAPTURE

1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18

Text: 1 Thessalonians 4

Introduction:

A couple had their first baby. The father had been assigned the dreaded task all fathers have of eventually changing his first dirty diaper. Well, this new father dreaded it like the bubonic plague, but finally gritted his teeth, took off the diaper of his little baby, only to discover that it was only a little bit dirty. He breathed a huge sigh of relief and was kind of chuckling to himself when his wife walked into the room. She immediately sized up what had happened and said, "If I were you, I wouldn't be too happy because that is just a sneak preview of the coming attractions."

It is the coming attractions that I want us to take a sneak preview of in the weeks to come. I want us to study and think about the things that are to come. The opening verse of the Book of Revelation says, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him, to shew unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass." It is those things that will come to pass that I want us to consider.

I believe that a study of coming attractions is Instructive - Illuminating - Inspiring - and Imperative. It is facts for the mind, food for the soul, and a force in the life.

Paul said in I Thess.4:13 "But I would not have you to be ignorant brethren." One preacher was voted out of his Church and for his last sermon he chose this verse as his text and preached on the subject, "I would not have you ignorant brethren."

That's not quite what Paul said. Paul was stating that he didn't want believers to not understand what the future holds. He wanted them to have an understanding of things to come.

The first coming attraction that we find on God's prophetic calendar is the "Rapture." The word rapture" is not found in the Bible, yet the concept is there. Paul said in I Thess.4:17, that believers will be "caught up."

When we talk about the rapture, we are talking about that event when the Lord will return and believers will be caught up - snatched out. You may not find the word "rapture" in the Bible, but you do find the truth of the rapture in the Bible.

Let's consider the rapture and what will take place when the rapture occurs.

1. THE DEFINITE ARRIVAL OF CHRIST AT THE RAPTURE

The rapture involves far more than a removal of the saints. It is first and foremost a return of the Saviour. This return is certain, sure, and definite.

A. Jesus Will Return Prophetically.

1. It has been estimated that one third of the Bible is about the second coming of Jesus Christ. It has been said that in the Old Testament there are 1,845 references to the return of Jesus. There are 17 books in the Old Testament that give it prominence.

2. In the 260 chapters of the New Testament there are 318 references, or one out of every 30 verses, that speak of the return of the Lord Jesus. More space is given to it than any other theme, including the death of Christ. For every prophecy on the first coming of Christ, there are 8 on His second coming.

3. The Old Testament Patriarchs portrayed His coming. The Old Testament Prophets predicted His coming. The New Testament

Apostles proclaimed His coming. Jesus Himself pronounced His coming.

Jesus said in John 14:3, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again." His first coming is a matter of history. His second coming is a matter of prophecy. Just as He came the first time, He will come the second time. We may not know when, but we know that He will.

B. Jesus Will Return Personally.

1. Notice what Paul said in I Thess.4:16, "For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven." Jesus will not only return prophetically but also personally.

2. Peter said in 1 Peter 1:8, "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory:" But oh glorious moment, one day we will see Him. He shall return personally and we shall see Him.

3. I think of Carrie Breck's great hymn:

Face to face with Christ, my Saviour,
Face to face what will it be?
When with rapture I behold Him,

Jesus Christ who died for me.

Face to face I shall behold Him,
Far beyond the starry sky;
Face to face in all his glory,
I shall see Him by and by.

4. Charles Gabriel wrote:

O that will be glory for me,
Glory for me, glory for me;
When by His grace,
I shall look on His face,
That will be glory, be glory for me.

Oh, what a day that will be, when my Jesus
I shall see. The glory of the
rapture is the coming of Jesus. He shall
come personally. We shall see Him
and look upon the face of the One Who
redeemed us by His grace. Yes, that
will be glory, glory for me.

2. THE DRAMATIC APPEARING OF CHRIST AT THE RAPTURE!

When Jesus returns and the rapture occurs it will not be some quiet, uneventful happening. It will be like

some dull evening at home. The things that will happen are very dramatic.

At the rapture there will not only be a great sight - we shall see Jesus - but there will be glorious sounds. Paul tells us in Vs.16, that the "Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God." Paul describes 3 dramatic sounds that we will hear at the rapture.

A. We Will Hear A Mighty Shout.

1. The Lord will descend from Heaven with a shout. The word "shout" is more than a shout like someone shouting at a ball game. The word is that of a command, a word of authority and might.

Illustration:

I think of when Jesus stood before the tomb of Lazarus and he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth," and to the amazement of the crowd, Lazarus who had been dead 3 days appeared in the doorway of the tomb, still wrapped in his grave clothes.

That was a mighty shout. It was a shout and command of authority. As someone has suggested, if Jesus hadn't said "Lazarus come forth," the whole graveyard would have got up.

I can't help but believe that the shout we will hear will be the same words Lazarus heard: "Come forth." It is of my persuasion that Jesus will descend from heaven and shout, "Church, come forth."

B. We Will Hear A Majestic Summons.

1. Next, we are told that we will hear the "voice of the archangel."

C. We Will Hear A Moving Song.

1. Finally we are told that we will hear "the trump of God." Paul clarifies this trumpet song in I Cor.15:52, as the "last trump."

2. Jesus will descend with a shout signifying, then the voice of the archangel will be heard, then the trump of God will sound!

3. THE DYNAMIC ACTIONS OF CHRIST AT THE RAPTURE!

At the rapture there will be a great sight - glorious sounds - and finally a grand scene. You have heard the expression, "You haven't seen nothing yet." Wait till the rapture.

A. There Will Be A Removal Of The Saints.

1. We read in Vs.16-17 "The dead in Christ shall rise first, Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up." Both those in the ground and on the ground will be "caught up" - snatched out - raptured.

2. Paul tells us that all this is going to happen in the "twinkling of an eye."

B. There Will Be A Reunion Of The Saints.

1. Notice in Vs.17, that when we are caught up we are "caught up together with them in the clouds and so shall we ever be with the Lord." We will be removed from this world and reunited with our loved ones.

2. What a glorious thought, the Rapture. It is no wonder John prayed, "Even so come, Lord Jesus."

Close:

On October 30, 1938, over a million-and-a-half listeners tuned into the most famous radio broadcast of all-time - War Of The Worlds, a dramatization of H.G. Wells' Classic science fiction novel about a Martian invasion.

Here's what happened.

Welles insisted on making the broadcast of War of the Worlds as realistic-sounding as possible. At first, the announcements that Martians had landed came in form of news bulletins interspersed between live big-band remotes. Gradually the tone of the broadcast became more hysterical. Some of the bulletins ("We take you now to Washington for a special broadcast on the national emergency...") sounded particularly unnerving to a nation on the verge of World War II.

Since the show had no sponsors, there were only a few interruptions to announce that the show was a dramatic presentation. Listeners tuning in mid-broadcast heard frightening "on the scene" descriptions of the attacking Martians. "Good heavens, something's wriggling out of the shadow like a gray snake. Now it's another one, and another. They look like tentacles to me. There, I can see the thing's body. It's large as bear and it glistens like wet leather. But that face...it's indescribable. I can hardly force myself to look at it. The eyes are black and gleam like a

serpent. The mouth is V-shaped with saliva dripping from its rimless lips that seem to quiver and pulsate." Although he was oblivious to the hysteria his program was stirring up, Welles was still clever enough to give the show a happy ending - the Martians are conquered and calm is restored. Welles concluded the broadcast by saying, "And if your doorbell rings and nobody's 'there', that was no Martian...it's Halloween.

By the time the broadcast was completed, millions of Americans were convinced that a Martian invasion had occurred. Police switchboards were flooded from coast to coast by calls from terrified listeners. Among the reactions:

One New Jersey resident mistook a water tower for the Martians and blasted it with a shotgun.

Twenty families from one apartment building evacuated their homes with wet towels on their faces to avoid deadly Martian rays.

Pennsylvania's governor offered troop support to New Jersey, where the invasion was supposedly taking place.

A woman paged her husband at a Broadway play to warn him of the attack - and many audience members fled with him.

A husband in Pittsburgh came home to find his wife with a bottle of poison in her hand saying "I'd rather die this way than that."

Despite the hysteria, no deaths resulting from the broadcast have ever been documented.

Although Orson Welles radio broadcast was just a joke, there is coming an invasion from outer space one day that will not be a joke. It will not be an UFO, Unidentified Flying Object, but the Returning Lord.

Are you ready?