

The Raptured Church

Revelation 4:1

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In Revelation 4:1, John says, “After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, ‘Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.’”

I heard the story of parents who took their little boy to the pet shop for his birthday, allowing him to pick out any dog he wanted. So the shop owner showed him all the dogs that were available—every kind of dog imaginable. But he picked the dog that had a non-stop wagging tail. Someone asked the little boy, “Why did you pick that particular dog?” His answer was, “Because I wanted the one with the happy ending.” I like that. That’s Revelation 4:1.

As we’ve journeyed through the seven churches of Asia Minor, not all the churches have brought joy to our hearts. There has been false doctrine, sin, lukewarmness, complacency, apathy and even apostasy. But thank God Jesus said, “I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”

So we move in these next several weeks to the church victorious. And today we see the church raptured, in Revelation 4:1, as the church is “caught up” to be with the Lord.

In Revelation 4 and 5, we discover that the church is happily in heaven. So we go from chapters 2 and 3, the church on earth, to the church in heaven. With chapter 4, verse 1, we come to the third main division of the book of Revelation.

In Revelation 1:19, John was given a key while on the island of Patmos. I call John “the prisoner of Patmos.” John was told in 1:19, “Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.” These are the three main divisions of Revelation. First, “things which you have seen” is the vision of Christ in chapter 1. In chapter 1, John saw the vision of Christ coming in His Second Coming power, glory and majesty. Secondly, John was told to write “the things which are.” This is the voice of Christ, what Christ said to the seven churches, in chapters 2-3. Thirdly, he was told to write “the things which will take place after this.” “After this” are the key words.

So now we have the victory of Christ, as He brings the church from earth to heaven. We’ve gone from the earthly scene to now the heavenly scene in chapters 4-5, and then the tribulation follows in chapter 6.

Revelation 4:1 opens and closes with the same Greek phrase, “meta tauta,” which is “after these things” or “after this.” John said, “After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, ‘Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.’” This is the same phrase, meta tauta, that is found in chapter 1, verse 19: “...the things which will take place after

this.”

I believe that Revelation 4:1 is the picture of the time when the church will be caught up or raptured to heaven. Now I admit that in the text, the word “rapture” does not appear. And in the text there is no teaching; this is prophetic literature. So we see a lot of pictures and types. So I think this is a picture. John is the one actually caught up to heaven here, but he represents the church. I’m going to show you why I believe this is the church.

In chapters 2 and 3, we read seven times the words “to the angel of the church in....” followed by the name of each of the seven churches. It’s a repetition seven times through chapters 2 and 3. We also saw at the end of each of the seven letters the phrase, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” So each letter opens with “to the angel of the church” and closes with “what the Spirit says to the churches.” As you go through the book of Revelation, you find that phrase repeated: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says,” but after chapter 3, the word “churches” is left out. So we find several references to “the church” or “churches” in chapters 2 and 3. That’s “the things which are.”

But now we move to “the things which will take place after this.” This is the period of time after the church age or after the church on earth is caught up to heaven. In 4:1, John sees from heaven down onto earth prophetically, as the revelation unfolds. He sees everything from a heavenly perspective.

That’s really how we have to look at this world: from heaven’s perspective.

So now we come to the third, main division, to “meta tauta” or “after these things.” Now the church is not seen again on earth until chapter 19, when it returns dressed in white robes, with Christ in His Second Coming in power and in great glory.

There is a contrast between the rapture, which we’ll study today, when Jesus Christ comes for His church, and the Second Coming, when Jesus Christ comes with His church. So the passage on the rapture indicates that the Lord comes to “catch us up” or to “snatch us up” to heaven, but in the Second Coming passages, He comes back visibly, powerfully and gloriously with the saints to establish His kingdom on earth for 1,000 years, known as “the millennial reign” of Christ. We don’t see the word “church” in the book of Revelation again until chapter 22, verse 16, where we hear the Lord Himself calling to the church in heaven to “Come” and drink.

What does all this indicate? It all indicates that the church will be raptured before the Great Tribulation on earth. So in chapters 2 and 3, the church is on earth; in chapters 4 and 5, the church is in heaven; and in chapter 6, the Antichrist is revealed—the white horse rider—holding a bow. He’s the Antichrist, not Jesus Christ. The Antichrist comes instead of and opposing Christ. Then begins all of God’s wrath poured out on earth, chapters 6-18. In chapter 19, Christ comes back with the church in His Second Coming to establish His millennial reign on the earth.

So I believe that Revelation 4:1 represents the rapture of the church. It doesn't teach it, but it pictures it in John being caught up into heaven. This is what we call a "pre-tribulation rapture" of the church.

There are different views in the church about the rapture, the tribulation and the Second Coming. When it comes to the rapture, there are those who hold a pre-tribulation view; the rapture will come before the tribulation, which I believe the Bible teaches. That's the view I hold. We have some who hold a mid-tribulation view; that during the middle of the tribulation, the church will be caught up to heaven. Then there are those who hold the post-tribulation view; they believe that at the end of the tribulation, the church is "caught up...to meet the Lord in the air," we do an immediate U-turn, theoretically, and come back to earth with Christ in the Second Coming.

I believe that Jesus is coming before the tribulation for the church in a pre-tribulation rapture of the church. Now some people don't believe in the rapture at all. It's impossible for me to exhaust the subject or give all the arguments for a pre-tribulation rapture, but I will give some points I think are important.

Let me give you some foundational truth. The doctrines of the church and the rapture in the New Testament are described as "mysteries." What is a "mystery"? In Ephesians 3:1-6, where Paul describes the church as a "mystery," he describes what a mystery is. He said that it is something that in ages past was hidden but is now made known. So a mystery is something that you couldn't know unless God revealed it, and He has. So a mystery isn't something that we can't know; it's something we can't know apart from revelation. And God has revealed it.

But it indicates something that the Old Testament did not reveal. So the church is not revealed in the Old Testament; it's not delineated or explained. There are a few pictures there where you can see that a reference might be made to Gentiles being saved, but the body of Christ with Christ as the head, made up of Jew and Gentile, with that middle partition destroyed and one body in Christ is made clear in the book of Ephesians. Ephesians is all about the body of Christ, of which Christ is the head. Colossians is all about the head, of which we are the body. So Ephesians focuses on the body, the church, and Colossians focuses on the head of the body, Christ.

The second reference to the rapture, in 1 Corinthians 15:51, also is called "a mystery." That means that the rapture is not in the Old Testament. I have people come to me all the time and want to find the rapture in the Old Testament. It's not in the Old Testament. By definition, it's a mystery.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:51-55, "Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep..."—a metaphor for "death"—"...but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye....For this incorruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality....Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?'" This is a classic

rapture passage at the end of the chapter on the resurrection of the body—both Christ and ours. We will see why in just a moment.

The church and the rapture are mysteries. Why do I say that? Whenever you're studying Bible prophecy, you have to keep these three people groups in their separate categories and God's purpose, plan and role for each one. Number one, Israel. Romans 9-11 gives God's purpose, plan and role for Israel. God elected them, they rejected Christ and God will restore them. The blindness is only temporary and partial for Israel. They will be restored. God will keep and fulfill His Davidic promises, His Abrahamic covenant with the nation of Israel.

I don't believe in "replacement theology," where God replaces Israel with the church. God made unconditional promises that He will not negate. So Israel must be kept separate.

Secondly, we have the Gentile nations, or the non-Christian nations, like Babylon, Medo-Persia, Rome. They all come into play in prophecy in Scripture.

The third category is the church. We've looked at the church in the seven letters of the apocalypse. We noticed that there is always in the church both wheat and tares or both the real and the false. So when we talk about the rapture, it only pertains to the wheat or to the genuine believers.

After the rapture of the church, there will still be churches operating, people congregating, but sadly, they will not be caught up, because they will not truly be in Christ. They're not true believers; they're chaff among the true wheat. So the rapture only belongs to the doctrine of the church when it is caught up into heaven.

Now I'm going to lay a foundation. This is important. The church was born in Acts 2, and the church will be complete and conclude its work on earth at the rapture. We don't know when the rapture will happen. I believe it can happen at any moment.

But this period, known as the church age, which is a pause or a parenthesis in God's purpose and plan for Israel, is seen in the teaching of the 70 weeks of Daniel's prophecy. In chapter 9, God gave Daniel a prophecy of 70 weeks or 70, 7-year periods or 490 years in which to bring in the Messiah and establish the kingdom. But after 483 years, Messiah was cut off—not for Himself, but the Bible says for the sins of His people. So there are seven years left on the calendar for Israel. Those seven years are known as the "seventieth week of Daniel" or "the time of Jacob's trouble."

The tribulation is not for the church. It hasn't been designed for the church. The tribulation is to judge the Gentile, wicked, unbelieving nations and to prepare Israel for the Messiah in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The church age will be complete at the rapture, which, I believe, happens in Revelation 4:1.

So "the things which are," chapters 2 and 3, the church age, is over at the rapture. It will have been this dispensation of grace. We'll next see God pour out His wrath upon the earth. So in

chapters 4 and 5, the church is clearly seen to be in heaven worshipping around the throne.

The word “church” in the Greek is the word “ekklesia.” It means “called-out assembly.” That’s another reason why I believe we should get together, group together and meet: because we are the ekklesia. We’re the called-out assembly. One day we’ll be called up. So we are called out of the world unto God, we are called unto one another in Christian fellowship and we’ll be called up to “meet the Lord in the air.”

So it isn’t any wonder that at this point in Revelation John hears a voice, after seeing a door open in heaven, saying, “Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this” or after the church age or dispensation.

Now let’s look at the prophetic picture of the church raptured to heaven in Revelation 4:1. John says, “After these things...”—or “meta tauta”—“...I looked...”—John is describing what he sees —“...and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard...”—he is also describing what he hears—“...was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, ‘Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.’”

Remember that Jesus said to the church in Philadelphia, in Revelation 3:8, “I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it.” So the first time we see the word “door” in Revelation is in 3:8. He told the church in Philadelphia that He had opened a door for them. That was the door of opportunity and service.

But the door of opportunity and service on earth will soon be shut. Catch that. Then we will have a door open in heaven when we will be “caught up...to meet the Lord in the air.” So in Revelation 4:1, the door of opportunity and service on earth had been shut, and the door of heaven was opened up.

So our opportunities for service on earth will soon come to an end. Take that to heart. Jesus said in John 9:4, “I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work.”

Have you ever noticed that the older you get, the faster time goes? They say that you peak at 25, and then you’re going down the slide. My theory is that the farther you get down that slide, the faster you go. You begin to realize that there is only so much time left for me to share the Gospel, for me to pray, for me to serve the Lord, for me to support missionaries, for me to do good, for me to be a blessing to others. So “I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work.” So when the door shut on earth, another door opened in heaven, and earth’s opportunities were over.

I shudder when I think of it. I don’t know how much time I have left to keep preaching. I don’t know how much time we have left to win our families, our loved ones and friends to Christ. Pretty soon that door will shut. Then the other door opens, we’ll be caught up to heaven and we’ll be rewarded for our service that we performed while the door was open on earth.

So heaven is our real home. Notice in verse 1 he said there was a door open “in heaven.” The Bible teaches that there is a heaven. As a Christian, it is your eternal home. We will spend eternity with Him there.

Jesus described this event in John 14, another classic rapture passage. While He was in the upper room, hours before He was to be crucified, He tells His disciples that one of them would betray Him, referring to Judas. He told them that one of them would deny Him, referring to Peter, and that He would be leaving them and where He would go, they couldn’t follow. But He immediately said to them, “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” He wouldn’t have said that if they hadn’t been troubled.

If you’re with Jesus having dinner, and He said that He’s leaving and some of you were really going to mess up, you’d say, “Whoa! I was having a good time until you said that.”

“Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid....You believe in God, believe also in Me.” In the Greek, it’s actually, “You do believe in God; also put your faith in Me.” Then He said, “In My Father’s house...”—referring to heaven—“...are many mansions.” One translation says “apartments.” I say, “No, thank you. I’ll read a different translation.” The word actually indicates “abiding places” or “rooms,” many rooms. Jesus continues, “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 to Myself; that where I am...”—in heaven—“...there you may be also.” Jesus describes so well what we know as the rapture of the church.

I believe that this is the first unveiling of the mystery, by our own Jesus, our Lord, when He says, “I will come again.” So He has gone to “prepare a place for [us]” in heaven. And I like that term for heaven: “My Father’s house.” This world is really not our home. We’re just passing through. Our real home is in heaven, so keep your perspective on heaven; we need to think about heaven, we need to long for heaven, we need to live for heaven and we need to be motivated by heaven right now, realizing that’s where we will spend eternity. Soon the door will be open in heaven.

I like John 10:9, where Jesus said, “I am the door.” There is only one door open in heaven. That door is Jesus Christ. The only way to get to heaven is through Him, because He’s “the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

Secondly, notice that John heard the “voice,” which was “like a trumpet.” First he saw a door open in heaven, then he heard “the first voice...like a trumpet.” What is this “voice” that was “like a trumpet,” in verse 1? It’s interesting that in Revelation 1:10, when John received the vision of Christ, on the island of Patmos, he said, “I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet.” He also described His voice “as the sound of many waters.” In 1 Thessalonians 4:16, where Paul said that when the Lord comes to rapture the church, there will be “the trumpet of God.” Then in 1 Corinthians 15:52, it says, “The trumpet will sound.” In all of these references there is a “Come up here,” and there is the sound of “a trumpet,” which is the voice of the Lord.

What did the voice “like a trumpet” say, in verse 1? It said, “Come up here.” In the Greek, this is called “an imperative”; it’s a command. Have you ever invited someone over to your house, and you don’t want them to feel obligated to come, so you say, “Well, if you’re not doing anything, and you have nothing else to do...” or “If you’re not busy, and if you’d really like to, we’d like to invite you over.” The Lord doesn’t say, “If you’re bored, if you’re busy and if you want to, ‘Come up here.’”

“Sure, I’m comin’. Why not?”

When the Lord says, “Come up here,” I’m ready to go up there.

So the Lord commands us; He doesn’t invite us. Again, in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, the classic rapture passage, Paul says, “Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up.” Here is our word “rapture” in the Bible: “caught up.” The words “caught up” is the Greek word “harpazo.” It means “to catch up,” “to snatch up” or “to take up by force.” In the Latin translation of the Bible, we get our word “rapture” from it or “rapturous” in Latin. In our English Bible, it would be “rapture.”

Some say that the rapture is not taught in the Bible; the word does not appear. I say that the Bible doesn’t use the word “rapture” in the English translation, but in the Latin translation it does. It doesn’t matter, because the meaning is the same. The Bible also doesn’t use the word “Trinity,” but we believe that God is triune in His nature. So the doctrine of the rapture is clearly taught: “Come up here” or “Rapture them up.”

Some also say that this concept is foolish and it’s not going to happen. But I want to point out that it has already happened in the past. Have you read the story of Enoch? I call him “Enoch, the space man.” The Bible says that every day “Enoch walked with God.” and then it says, “And he was not, for God took him.” How cool is that! Every afternoon God and Enoch would take a walk. One day, it was said that they were way out on their walk when the Lord said, “Enoch, we’re closer to My house than yours; come home with Me.” People said, “Where is Enoch? Where did he go?”

“God took him to heaven.” That’s cool. I like that.

Have you ever read the story of the prophet Elijah? Remember how he went to heaven? A big, fiery chariot came down and swooped him up. That’s what you call “goin’ in style”!

“Swing low, sweet chariot,

Comin’ for to carry me home.”

Well, we’re going to be “caught up...to meet the Lord in the air.”

Another example is Paul the Apostle, in 2 Corinthians 12, one of my favorite chapters. In that chapter, Paul is defending his apostolic ministry, and how he had visions of heaven. He says, “I

know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know...how he was caught up into Paradise” or “the third heaven.” “The third heaven” is the dwelling place of God. It’s not that heaven has three compartments and the super saints get to live on the top level. The atmosphere around the earth is the first heaven, where the Bible says, “The birds fly in heaven.” The Bible says, “The heavens declare the glory of God”; that’s the second heaven, where the stars and the moon and the sun are. The third heaven is the dwelling place of God. That is where Paul was caught up to. He heard things and saw things which were unimaginable and “inexpressible.”

It’s interesting that Enoch, Elijah and Paul didn’t come back and write a book about it. “I went to heaven, and this is what I saw.” They sold it for \$39.95, appeared on TV and had interviews.

There were only two people who went to heaven and came back and can tell about Jesus. It was Paul and the Apostle John. John got caught up to heaven. He said in verse 2: “Immediately I was in the Spirit,” which is another indication of the rapture. We will be raptured “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye” or “immediately.” It will happen so fast, you can’t blink that quick.

So John is caught up into heaven, and he hears a voice. This voice said, “Come up here,” and he is caught up. Next, the voice said, “I will show you things which must take place after this,” or, again, that same phrase from 1:19—“meta touta” or it is after the church age. So this is the period of time when the tribulation starts on earth, but when the church is in heaven. We are caught up before the tribulation, when Jacob’s trouble will be upon the earth.

Another reason why I believe in a pre-tribulation rapture is because of “the doctrine of imminency.” It means that nothing has to happen before the rapture takes place. You could get raptured at any second, even while I’m preaching this sermon on the rapture. I’ve always thought it would be so awesome if I would get raptured while I was preaching on the rapture! We would just be “caught up...to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.” How glorious that would be.

So nothing needs to happen before the rapture; the Antichrist doesn’t have to come before the rapture. I’m not looking for the Antichrist. People ask me all the time, “Do you think so and so is the Antichrist?” I don’t care if he’s the Antichrist. I’m looking for Jesus Christ. The Bible says, “The moon shall turn to blood,” so people say, “Oh, it looks like blood!” They’re freakin’ out! I’m not looking for a blood moon; I’m looking for Jesus Christ. People are looking at the famines and earthquakes and all these things. But these things are only the beginning birth pains. They’re going to intensify during the tribulation, but we’ll be in heaven with the Lord. But the Bible says, “Comfort one another with these words.”

Some say, “You pre-tribulation Christians, you’re such wimps! You don’t want to face the tribulation.”

I say, “Yeah, that’s right, buckaroo! I am a wimp. ‘Even so, come, Lord Jesus!’ Amen.” I don’t

want to be here for the Antichrist; I'm looking for Jesus Christ. It's so important to realize that our hope is in Christ.

So John was immediately in the Spirit in verse 2, and he saw God on the throne. He said, "Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne." Revelation has actually been called "the book of the throne." About 47 times, the word "throne" appears in Revelation. In chapters 4 and 5, the word "throne" appears 17 times. So it's all about the throne. When John is caught up to heaven, he sees a throne, and I'm so glad he sees God on the throne. Whenever he sees the throne, it's not vacated.

John also saw the church in heaven around the throne, verse 4. "Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns..."—or "stephanos"—"...of gold on their heads." They had victor's crowns on their heads. These twenty-four elders represent the church.

So after the church age, John hears a voice, which said, "Come up here." A door is open in heaven. He sees God on the throne and the glory around the throne, the rainbow. And he sees the church, represented by these twenty-four elders caught up to heaven. This is the church victorious. This is the true church, that will be "caught up...to meet the Lord in the air."

What are the components of the rapture? Again, the classic rapture passages are John 14, 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. Starting in 1 Thessalonians 4:13, John says, "But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep..."—a metaphor for "died"—"...lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep."

In verses 13-15, they had a problem going on in the church in Thessalonica and the pillars that the rapture rested on. The problem was that Paul had taught them that Christ would return and catch the church up to heaven, but it hadn't happened yet, and some of their believing loved ones had already died. So the believers in Thessalonica believed that their Christian friends who had already died had missed the rapture. They thought the dead Christians had a disadvantage over those who were still alive. They were freaking out. So the Apostle Paul said, "Don't be ignorant, brethren." Someone said, "That's the largest Christian denomination in America—the ignorant brethren." How true that is.

Some of the most frequent questions I get from Christians are, "Where do we go when we die? What happens when we die? Will we go to heaven when we die?" It's so clear in the Bible: "To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord."

But the Thessalonians were worried that the Lord would return and their loved ones who had died would miss the rapture. So Paul said, "Don't be ignorant about those." He uses the metaphor for death as "sleep." This term for death is only used for Christians, and it refers only

to the body, not the soul. The Bible never refers to our soul or spirit as sleeping; only to the body. Why? Because our body will be awakened; it'll be resurrected. It's called "the great gettin'-up morning," when the dead in Christ shall rise first. So the resurrection body, the body that may have been cremated, may have decayed, may have been thrown overboard at sea and the sharks may have eaten it, will rise again.

You say, "Well, how is He going to resurrect those?" You think anything is too hard for God? The same question is asked in 1 Corinthians 15, where Paul replies, "Foolish one." You think God has a problem resurrecting those people? No. There will be a resurrection, and Jesus is "the firstfruits of those who sleep." Jesus' resurrection body is a prototype of our resurrection body. So Paul says not to be worried, not to freak out. He told them not to "sorrow as others who have no hope." There is hope in Jesus.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:14-15, Paul gives us the pillars of the foundation of the rapture. There are three of them. The first is the death of our Lord. "If we believe that Jesus died...." The second is the Resurrection of our Lord—"and rose again." The third, verse 15, is the Word of the Lord: "For this we say to you by the word of the Lord."

Paul lays the foundation for the rapture. Jesus died for your sins. Jesus rose from the dead. God has revealed this verse 15 by His Word. This is not Paul just whimsically and arbitrarily inventing some crazy concept that we'll be "caught up to meet the Lord." No; Paul said Jesus died, Jesus rose and the Word of the Lord reveals this to us. Those are the foundations.

Now there are five components to this in verses 16-18. He said, "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first." So Paul says not to be worried about those who have died; they'll be the first to be resurrected. "Then we..."—Paul includes himself in this group—"...who are alive and remain shall be caught up..."—or "harpodzoed," "raptured" or "snatched up"—"...together with them..."—with those who had died—"...in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord." Here's the comfort: "Therefore comfort one another with these words."

These five components of the rapture are, first, the return of Christ; "The Lord Himself will descend from heaven." When Jesus ascended back into heaven from Mt. Olivet in Acts 1, the angels said, "This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven." Not only in the Second Coming, but when He comes to get the church in the rapture to take them to heaven, He'll "come in like manner."

The second component, in verse 16, is the resurrection of the dead. "And the dead in Christ will rise first." I preached many weeks on 1 Corinthians 15, which concludes with the rapture of the church. It's part of the resurrection; the dead in Christ will be physically resurrected.

This is how it works, by the way. If you die before the rapture, your soul and spirit, the immaterial part of you, will leave your body, which results in your death. It will go immediately to

heaven to be with the Lord. "To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord." You're face to face with Jesus. Then you will be awaiting the resurrection of your physical body, which will happen at the rapture. At that time, your soul and spirit will be reunited with your resurrected body. You will be forever in a glorified body. So the saints of the church that are in heaven right now are in what's called "the intermediate state." They are with the Lord, enjoying the presence of the Lord, awaiting the resurrection of their physical bodies. That would be phase 2 of the resurrection. Christ is phase 1. They're with the Lord now, but their bodies will be resurrected.

The third component is the rapture of the living in Christ. This is what we often focus on when we talk about the rapture, but it is only one of several components. The Lord returns, the dead are resurrected and the living are translated or raptured. We are "caught up...to meet the Lord in the air."

Fourthly, verse 17, we have a reunion. So we have the return of Christ, resurrection of the dead, rapture of the living and the reunion in Christ. I love that. "Together with them." So don't "sorrow as others who have no hope," because we will be "together with them." All of my family members who died in Christ, all of the dear, precious saints I've known over the years who have gone to be with Christ—I'll be "together with them." How glorious will that be to see your loved ones, to see your family members, to hug them again and to talk to them! The rapture is going to be a great reunion. What a glorious thing that will be!

Lastly, there will be a reassurance, verse 18. "Therefore comfort one another with these words." What words? The words we just read in verses 14-17. So first, what a glorious comfort is the rapture of the church.

1 Thessalonians 5:9 says, "God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." What comfort would it be if the Lord said, "You'll have to go through the tribulation. But hang in there; it'll all pan out in the end." No. The comfort is that we'll be with our loved ones and we'll be with Christ during the tribulation.

The second motive of the rapture is that it cleanses us. 1 John 3:3 says, "Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." If you believe, with all your heart, that Jesus could come at any moment, you're going to live a holy, godly life. You don't want to be thinking or doing things that are displeasing to the Lord when the trumpet sounds, when that voice shouts. You want to be found in Him, serving Him and looking for Him.

Thirdly, the rapture compels us. In 1 Corinthians 15:58, Paul says, "Therefore, my beloved brethren...always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."

So the rapture comforts us, it cleanses us and it compels us to live for Him, who died for us.

"Only one life, 'twill soon be past.

Only what's done for Christ will last."

At any time now, the door of opportunity on earth will shut, but a door's going to be opened in heaven.