

The Rapture

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

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We're looking together at what the Bible teaches about the end of time. It's called eschatology. It's the study of future things and what we have yet in the future and how it will unfold. Tonight, we look at the first event and the unfolding of the end of times, and I want to get directly to the point it's called the rapture or sometimes the rapture of the church to be more specifically.

Now, as the church, we're not waiting for the end of the world. We're looking for and waiting for, Titus 2:13, that blessed hope of the glorious appearing of our great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ. So, we're not looking for signs, we're looking for the Savior. We see the signs that we're living in the end of time, but our hope, our focus, our anticipation is looking for Jesus Christ who promise to return and to take us home to heaven, to be with Him in the Father's house.

Now, last week I pointed out that there were three key groups of people to keep in their proper place when it comes to God's purpose and plan. In 1 Corinthians 10:13, we attend 32, excuse me, we have these three groups named, if you want to write that down. Paul says, "Give none offense, neither to the Jews, that would be the nation of Israel, nor the Gentiles, and that would be the non-Jews, and then there would be nor the church of God."

Now, in the context, Paul is talking about not offending anyone by exercising your liberties in Christ. But it's interesting that he mentions these three categories. So, we talked about the Gentile nations and we looked at Daniel chapter 2, and we looked at Nebuchadnezzar's image of the head of gold, the breast in arms of silver and the belly of thigh of brass. The two legs of iron and the feet and toes of iron and clay.

And we talked about the world ruling empires from Babylon all the way down to the Roman Empire, and this demise until there'll be a revived Roman Empire at the end of time, at which time the Lord Jesus Christ will come pictured as a rock cut out of heaven without hands, smoke that image on its feet, the image fell and that rock groomed to a great mountain. That's the second coming of Jesus Christ and is establishing his kingdom, bringing an end to the kingdom of the Gentiles.

Now, in Daniel's prophecy, it starts with Babylon and ends with the Roman Empire. But you can actually go back, it's not in the prophecy. But you first had the Egyptian Empire and you had the Assyrian empire, but we have these kingdoms of men that will come to an end when Christ returns and he establishes his kingdom.

Then, we looked at the nation of Israel and the covenant promises that God made to Abraham, it's called the Abrahamic Covenant, that God would bless him and those who bless him, they would be blessed. And that God would give him the seed that would bring in the Messiah, the Savior of the world, and that he would have the land of Israel from the great river of Egypt to the river of Euphrates.

And we said that if you take a literal approach to interpreting the scripture, God still in the future yet needs to fulfill His promise completely to Abraham. Then, we looked at the Davidic Covenant, the promise that David seed, Messiah Christ would sit upon his throne. In Daniel chapter 9, we look together and we're going to look at it again tonight, the timeline that the 70 weeks of Daniel prophesied about God's purpose and God's plan, and God's program for the nation of Israel.

From the beginning of the going forth to restore and rebuild Jerusalem 445 BC to the coming of the prince, that that would be 483 years. But the ultimate time would go out 490 years. But we pointed out, and I'll look at it with you in a moment, there was a pause of what we call the church age.

So, tonight, we move to again a very vast subject and one of my great frustrations is that we can't spend weeks on each one of these points, but the goal of this series is to compact it and simplify it and lay it out in chronological order. But we move from the Gentile nations to the nation, from the nation of Israel to the church. We need to understand God's purpose and God's plan, and God's design for the church as he ordained it.

Now, there's five main points I'm going to share with you tonight, if you want to write them down. The first is the question, "What is the church?" A lot of times, we don't stop and ask ourselves if the church is going to be raptured, then we have to stop and say, "What is the church?" We're going to look at the rapture. But before we look at the rapture, just quickly and briefly, we need to look at the church. When we say the church will be raptured, just who is the church and what is the church?

Now, I remember God called Abraham to begin a new nation. Abraham became the first Hebrew, Jew or Israelite. And again, I don't have time to go into all this, but before Abraham, all there were, were Gentiles. You got this? And Abraham started actually as a Gentile. He was in Ur of the Chaldees, and it was a pagan area. They worshiped the sun and the moon.

But Abraham believed in one God, and God came to him and God revealed Himself to him, and it all started with Father Abraham. And then, before the call of Abraham, only Gentiles. Now, after Abraham caught this, there were two groups. There were Jews and there were Gentiles. And those were the two main categories. The first two divisions, the Gentile Nations and the People of Israel, because Abraham had Isaac and Isaac had Jacob. Jacob had 12 sons, and those 12 sons became the 12 tribes of the nation of Israel. And Jacob's name was changed to Israel.

So, they became the foundation of the Jewish nation, and God had a purpose that through that nation, the Messiah would come and he would die for the sins of the world. But God would create, catch this point a new group, a third category. And in Ephesians 2:15, Paul calls this new group, the new man. I love what John Stott calls it. He calls it the new humanity. I love that.

So, you have the Gentiles, then you have the call of Abraham, you have then the nation of

Israel, and then you have the church. All of a sudden, the church shows up and it's a new entity. It's not Greek nor Barbarian or Scythian, not Jew or Gentile, but it's all one family in Jesus Christ. Now, we could stop and spend several weeks studying the doctrine of the church, and we don't have the time in the series to do that.

But I want to point out that in the Old Testament, the prophets saw the mountain peaks of prophecy, but they didn't really see the valleys between them. So, they did not see the church. That's why the church is not directly referred to in the Old Testament, they saw the birth of Messiah, and thou Bethlehem, though that be little among the nations, yet out of thee shall come forth he, who will be ruler of my people.

They saw through Isaiah, the prophet unto as a Child is born, unto as a Son is given. And His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Prince of Peace. The increase of His kingdom, there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, the order and establish it. So, they saw the first coming of Christ in His birth. They saw His death. Isaiah 55, wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities. By His stripes were healed.

They saw the tribulation period, the time described as Jacob's trouble. All the prophets mentioned, especially the minor prophets as they talk about the time of trouble and darkness and wrath upon the earth. And then, they saw the second coming. But these gaps between that they did not see, they did not understand.

So, the question is, "Where does the church fit in? Where did the church begin?" The church began in Acts chapter 2 on the day of Pentecost. I think it's cool, the church had a beginning and it was a miraculous day when the Holy Spirit came and there was what's called the Baptism of the Spirit, 1 Corinthians 12:13, "When we were all united in one body. And we were united to Christ as the head."

So, the formation of the church took place in Acts chapter 2. Prior to that, the church did not exist. But now, we have this new humanity that the prophets didn't see or understand what a glorious truth that is. So, the church was born on the day of Pentecost miraculously.

Now, the word in the New Testament church is the Greek word *ekklesia*, and it means, the called-out assembly or called out ones. So, we are called out of the world, were called unto God, and one day we will be called up to heaven to be with the Lord. Now, how do you become a part of this church that started in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost? The answer is by being born again.

When you turn from your sin, trust Jesus as your savior whether you're a Jew or whether you're a Gentile, whether you're rich or poor, male or female, whether you're bond or free, you become a child of God and you are translated from darkness into light and you're part of the body of Christ and God becomes your father.

But there is the church that is universal. It's not a denomination, it's not an affiliation. Every person who's been born again all over the world is part of this family, this church, the body of

Christ. And then, there's the church local, revival Christian fellowship is an expression of the local church. But I want you to understand that in the local church there are people who haven't been born again, they just start to come to church, they just start to check it out, or maybe they say they've trusted Christ and they really haven't. They haven't really been born again. Are they claim to be Christians? Many parts of the world that Christianity is cultural. It's not a real relationship with God through Christ.

So, there is the professing church, and I point that out because we're going to see when the rapture happens, only the true church will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. There'll be people who are going to churches and they will continue even after the rapture because they were not part of the universal church, the body of Christ, they weren't born again.

So, when will the church end upon earth? The end of the church on earth will be at our subject tonight, the rapture of the church. The church begin, listen to me carefully, begin with a miracle. It will go out with a miracle. It began with the coming of the Holy Spirit. It will go out with the catching up of the church to meet the bride, groom in heaven as the heavenly bride. It's not an end to the church we'll be in heaven, and then we'll return with Christ in the second coming, but is the end of the church on earth. So, the end of the church is the rapture of the church.

Now, I want to put up the chart on the screen for just a moment, and I want to make reference to it together with you. As I said, the church is a pause or a parenthesis in God's program and plan for the nation of Israel. This chart points out in 445 BC, Nehemiah chapter 2, the king Artaxerxes gave the commandment the Jews were in Babylonian captivity to go back to Jerusalem and to restore and to rebuild the city of Jerusalem.

This prophecy given to Daniel is what's called the 70 weeks of Daniel or Seventy Sevens, which is 490 years or week, what that means a unit of seven. But when you look at the calendar, you can determine that it's 70 years that is determined upon God's people. So, 490 years totally is the timeframe from the commandment to go forth and restore Jerusalem until the second coming of Jesus Christ is 490 years.

Four hundred eighty-three years have already been fulfilled, but I believe, and we're going to break it down over these next few weeks, even more from tonight, is that when Jesus Christ was crucified, rejected by the nation of Israel, that God actually swung the door open for Gentiles to come in and to be saved. Now, Jews are being saved during this period, but it is a time where God is pouring out His spirit and saving Gentiles. And when the fullness of the Gentiles come in and the church is complete made up of Jew and Gentile, the church will be raptured or caught up to be with the Lord.

Now, this chart does not show you in the church age the beginning of the... It shows you the rapture, but it doesn't really show you that the Antichrist will be revealed and make a covenant with Israel for seven years. That seven-year period is the 70th week of Daniel. But what I want to point out is that, there is a pause there of the church age and you need to understand the church, God's purpose, God's plan.

You can study for the present age to preach the gospel, to be the light of the world, to preach the goodness of God and the grace of God, and for people to be saved. Jesus said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel," and that's the church's great commission. But let's move on and talk about secondly, the concept of the rapture. Some would say that it's not in the Bible. I want to address some of the aspects of the rapture. Some I'm saying it's not really a biblical doctrine at all. It's not really in scripture.

But I want you to note in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, when Paul says, "Then we which are alive and remain shall be," here's our word rapture, caught up. The word is *harpazo* in the Greek, and it only means to be caught up, we're going to be raptured. Now, if you had a Latin Vulgate translation of the Bible, you would actually have the word *raptus*, which means rapture.

So, the word caught up is a reference to the rapture of the church. You know that the word trinity is not in the Bible, but we believe in the doctrine of the trinity. The word millennium isn't in the Bible, but we believe in the thousand-year millennial reign of Christ. Now, the rapture of the church is a New Testament mystery. You must catch this, 1 Corinthians 15:51. Paul says, "Behold, I show you a mystery." Now what that means is that, it's one of the things in the New Testament revealed that in the Old Testament was concealed. It wasn't revealed.

You don't have the rapture taught or showed. Maybe, there's some pictures or concepts as I'll point out, but it's not explicitly declared in the Old Testament. A New Testament mystery is something hidden in the ages past, but is now made known unto the people of God. Now, another objection some people say is that the word, that the rapture is a modern doctrine, that the early church fathers did not teach the doctrine of the rapture.

Now, it's true that the church did not develop a systematic doctrine of the rapture or a pretribulation rapture until after the reformation. But it's not true that the early church fathers didn't believe in a rapture. You can read the writings of the early church fathers, and they would write clearly that they were expecting the Lord to return for his people, which is what we call the doctrine of imminency, that nothing has to take place before the Lord comes for his church.

And then, there's a lot of other crazy ideas about it was created by John Darby, and he got the idea from other people, and it's not really a biblical concept. Let me point out that even before the reformation that the church didn't understand the doctrine of justification by faith. They didn't even understand the doctrine of the individual priesthood of the believer that these are things that developed in the church as we got back into the Bible and turned to it with understanding as the work of spirit was working in our hearts.

And it was something that God was doing at that time, but because the Bible was suppressed and not in the hands of the people, there were many doctrines in the church's history that didn't come to the surface until the reformation, until late later years and were developed. But another point I want to make is, the authority for a doctrine is not tradition or church history. The authority for a doctrine is the Bible and the Bible alone. You know the drill, the B-I-B-L-E. Yes, that's the book for me. I stand alone on the word of God, the B-I-B-L-E.

So, those who we should look into the history of doctrines and we should look into what the early church believed and taught, they were messed up in a lot of things and confused about a lot of things. And so, I believe that this doctrine is in the Bible that is clearly taught in the Bible, and it's not a matter of what the church believed and its different points in history, but about what the Bible teaches clearly in its authority.

There are pictures of so to speak, or raptures in the Old Testament, even though it's not clearly revealed or taught. I think of Enoch, the Bible says, he did what? He walked with God. And then, he was not, he was raptured, he was caught up. He was actually taken, did a long walk with God one day and he never came home. His wife was waiting for dinner and he never showed up. Can you imagine that? And he was caught up to be with the Lord.

I think of Elijah who was caught up in a chariot of fire. The angels came down and swooped Elijah up and caught him up to heaven. In the New Testament, Revelation 11:12, there will be two witnesses, probably Jewish individuals and they will be preaching the gospel of Christ to the nation of Israel during the time of the tribulation. And the Bible says, that people hated him so much that they were murdered. Their bodies lie in the streets of Jerusalem for three days and after the end of that time they woke up, they stood up, then they ascended visibly, bodily right back in the heaven and their enemies watched them go up into heaven.

There's a picture even in the New Testament of the rapture so to speak, and we know that Jesus stood on the Mount Olivet, and He was caught up right into heaven and a cloud received Him out of their sight. We know that Paul the Apostle, 2 Corinthians chapter 12 was caught up into the third heaven, and he saw and heard things that were unspeakable.

So, we know that the Lord can do that. Now, it's clearly found that is the rapture in the New Testament. I counted today and I was going to put them on the screen for you, but I spared you. I counted 32 references to the rapture in the New Testament. But let me mention just three of the most important ones. Number one, John 14, when Jesus is with His disciples in the upper room, and by the way, He's disclosing to them that the program was not going to be the kingdom now with a Messiah on the throne of David, and his disciples sitting on 12 thrones.

But the program was going to be His death, His resurrection, His ascension to heaven and a time period where the church would cover the whole earth and preach the gospel, and that they would be servants to others. So, in John 14, He said, "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. You believe in God, believe also in Me, for in my father's house, which is a reference to heaven, are many abiding places, many dwelling places. If it were not true, I would've told you, I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare this place for you, here's the promise. He said, I will come again and I will receive you. It's almost like He was thinking of the rapture there, and I think He was. He said, I will receive you unto myself that where I am there you may be also, where would he be in the father's house?

So, He is not coming back to sit on the throne of David. That's the second coming. He's coming in the clouds to catch up His church, the bride to heaven. And when the church is caught up to

heaven, there will be the marriage, supper of the lamb and there will be the bema seat of Christ will be rewarded for our service. So, right down John 14, it's a revelation of the rapture.

Then, the second classic passage is 1 Corinthians 15:51, and I know we've covered it before where Paul says, "Behold I show you a mystery. We shall not all sleep or die, but we shall be changed in a moment in the twinkling of an eye." That's how fast a rapture's going to happen. And he says, "At that moment, this corruptible, my body will put on incorruption." He said, "This mortal will put on immortality." And he said, "That moment, it'll be brought to pass the saying that is written, death swallowed up in victory. Oh, death wears your sting. Oh, grave where is your victory."

So, Paul is describing there in that chapter on the resurrection that the Lord will come and change our bodies in a moment in the twinkling of an eye. I believe that that is a reference to the rapture. Just a footnote here, the rapture is not in Matthew 24 or 25, what is known as the Olivet Discourse. When Jesus said, "Two shall be in the field, one should be taken, the other left. Two should be grinding in the meal, one taken and the other left." He's not talking about the rapture. He's talking about, when He comes back the second time that He will take people away in judgment.

The third passage, and it's the one I want to look at with you for a moment, is 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, and this leads me to my third main point that is the components of the rapture. Let's read the passage. Paul says, "But I would have you not to be ignorant brethren concerning them which are asleep." Now, when it comes to eschatological doctrines, there's a great ignorance. He says, "That you sorrow not, verse 13, 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, God will bring with him."

Notice the contrast here at the end of verse 13, others, unbelievers, people are not a part of the church. They sorrow as having no hope. When someone they love dies, there's a hopeless sorrow. But we believers, we do have hope, verse 14, because we believe Jesus died, Jesus rose and then which have died or fallen asleep in Jesus. Look at the end of verse 14. He will bring with Him. They will be coming back with the Lord to meet us in the air.

So, we have hope. For we saying to you by the word of the Lord that which are alive and remain, verse 15, under the coming of the Lord shall not precede them which are sleep. Now, there are three foundations for the rapture, verse 14, Jesus died on the cross for our sins. The second one is the resurrection, Jesus rose again from the dead. And the third is verse 15, we tell you these things by the word of the Lord that is revelation.

So, we have His crucifixion, His resurrection, and a revelation of God to Paul that the dead in Christ would rise first, and we were alive and remain, should be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. Now, the reason Paul wrote this passage was he had taught them about the rapture, but some time had lapsed and some of their loved ones in Christ, their Christian friends and family had begun to die. And they were freaking out thinking, "Wait a minute, you can't die. Jesus

hasn't come back yet." If you're dead and gone, you're going to miss it. You're going to be at a disadvantage. You're going to lose out at the rapture.

So, Paul says, "No, no, no, no, no, no, don't be ignorant about those that have fallen asleep." And again, he uses this beautiful metaphor for death, only for the believer and only for the body. They're only sleeping, their bodies are laying in the grave waiting for that great getting up, mourning the resurrection. So, Paul says, "You don't need to sorrow." And he goes on to explain that they will not be at a disadvantage when the Lord returns.

He says in verse 16 to 18, "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven and He'll do with that, with a shout with the voice of the archangel, with the trump of God, the dead in Christ shall rise first, then we which are live and remain shall be caught up together with them, that is those who have died before us in the Lord. In the clouds, we'll meet them and we'll meet the Lord in the air, so shall we be forever with the Lord." Here's the conclusion, comfort, verse 18, one another with these words.

The rapture of the church involves the resurrection of the dead who died in Christ because they were part of the church, and the translation of the living who are alive when the Lord returns. Now, there are five components of the rapture that I want to point out to you in this passage from verse 16 down to verse 18. The first is the return of Christ. That's the first component of the rapture. Jesus Christ is coming in the clouds. Amen. What a glorious thing that will be. He promised it in John 14, and He never breaks a promise, "I will come again."

So, there's the return of the Lord. The Lord himself, He won't send someone else. He shall descend from heaven with the shout and the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God. Now, remember in Acts chapter 1, when Jesus ascended from Mount Olivet back into heaven, that the angels showed up and the disciples were looking up into the heavens, and what must have been a mind-blowing experience to see Jesus go visibly and bodily and gloriously back into heaven. He had a glorious entrance. He came into the world to the virgin womb, and He went back ascending into heaven.

The angel said, "Why do you stare into heaven the same Jesus which you've seen go, the same Jesus, which you've seen go shall come in like manner." How did he go? Visibly, physically. How will He come? Visibly and physically. But He'll only come in the clouds at the rapture to catch the church up, to meet him in the air. But notice the second component, by the way, I didn't mention it. But notice there's the voice of the archangel, the trump of God.

And don't confuse this trump of God with the seventh trumpet in the plagues poured out in the time of the tribulation, that trumpet brings judgment. This trumpet brings blessing as the church is caught up to be with him. And it's not the last trumpet that the church will hear. But the second component, write it down. The first is the return of Christ, the second is the resurrection of the dead in Christ.

Now, I'm using that term very specifically, they are the dead in Christ. In the Old Testament

when a believer died, they weren't in Christ, they weren't part of the church. They won't be resurrected until the end of the tribulation. But the church period, we die in Christ because we are in Christ positionally. So, notice what it says there in verse 16 says, "And the dead in Christ shall rise first." Now, there's a lot of confusion about this statement. What does it mean? Don't Christians go to heaven when they die? Yes. Well, then why are the dead raising? It is only a reference to their physical bodies. And if you understand that, it clears up the passage. He's only a reference to their physical bodies. Jesus Christ is the first fruits of them that sleep. He's a prototype of our resurrected body.

So, when you die and your body is laid in the grave, maybe it's cremated, maybe it's just been in the grave so long, it's hardly there anymore. God will resurrect that body into a glorified body like the body Jesus had on Easter Sunday when He came out of the grave, and it will be reunited with your soul and spirit, and you'll have that glorified body in heaven forever with the Lord. You say, "What are we doing in heaven right now?" We're in which theologians call the intermediate state.

Those that die right now, they're with the Lord. But they're waiting for their resurrected bodies. They're with the Lord, they're enjoying the presence of the Lord, but they haven't gotten their glorified bodies yet. It happens in the moment of the rapture. So, it involves the resurrection of those who have died in the church age.

And then, the third component, write it down, is the rapture of the living in Christ. So, the return of Christ, the resurrection of the dead in Christ, and the rapture of the living in Christ, verse 17, "Then we which are alive and remain shall be harpazo, caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air." So, there are those that have died in Christ resurrected. Then, there are those who are alive in Christ and this is what we hope will be, will be caught up, will be snatched up or raptured to meet the Lord in the air.

So, there's return of Christ, the resurrection of the dead in Christ, the rapture of the living in Christ. And then, number four component is the reunion because of Christ. Do you know that because of Jesus Christ, your loved ones who died trusting Jesus, knowing Jesus born again, that you will be reunited with them? Notice these phrases there in verse 17 says, "Together with them. Together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, so shall we forever be with the Lord."

So, there's two together there. We'll be together with our loved ones, our friends, our family who have died and gone to be with the Lord. Their bodies will be resurrected. And I know I'm going to get this question tomorrow, so I'll answer it right now. Will we know one another in heaven? The answer is yes. You won't meet somebody that looks, and then after a million years you'll figure out, "Hey, we used to be married." You'll know them. They knew Jesus after He resurrected from the dead, and I believe that they will, we will know one another. What a glorious truth that is.

So, we will be together with our loved ones. There will be a reunion with our loved ones and

with the Lord. That's the component of the rapture. And then, fifthly, the reassurance. Notice that in verse 18, "Therefore or wherefore, comfort one another with these words." What are these words? Verse 16 to verse 18, the words that your loved ones who have died are not at a disadvantage, they're not perished.

As matter of fact, they're going to go first, and we heard live remain are going to be caught up to meet them in the air. What a glorious truth that is. Someone said jokingly, they go first because they were six feet below us. But they're with the Lord. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord, 2 Corinthians chapter five, "But we'll be all meeting together in heaven, and then there will be the reunion and the reassurance."

So, this is why he says, it's a comfort. Comfort one another with these words. Now, last time, I don't mention it or touch on that, I'm going to talk about evidence for the rapture before the tribulation. Notice that Paul says, "Comfort yourselves with these words. You'll be reunited with your love." He didn't say you have to go through a time of tribulation. It's a thing of comfort.

So, the rapture does three things, comforts us, verse 18, cleanses us, 1 John 3:3, "Everyone that has this hope in the coming of the Lord for the church purifies himself even as he is pure." And it compels us, John 9:4, where Jesus said, "The night comes when no man can work." So, while it is day, metaphorically speaking, while I'm alive and here on earth and I have opportunity, I must work the works of him that sent me.

So, we have daylight right now, we need to be busy working to tell others about Jesus Christ. It's interesting that the end of the section on the rapture in 1 Corinthians 15:58 that Paul says, "Therefore, my beloved brethren be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." Why? He said number four, because you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

One of the reasons I'm doing this series is though, we as believers will once again be reminded of the fact that Jesus Christ is coming for his bride. And then, we would be living in expectations. We would be comforted by that. We would be cleansed by that. And as Lord forgive me and help me to be ready and right with you, and Lord compel me to go out and tell others the good news that you're coming soon.

Now, I want to move to my fourth main point tonight and that is the contrast of the rapture with the second coming. There's a lot of confusion and I won't tarry on it. A lot of people think that there's one, they're one and the same. A lot of people see no difference between this doctrine of the rapture of the church, and the second coming of Jesus Christ, and they don't make the distinction of the two.

And again, that could be a whole message in itself, but Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice and their excellent book Charting the End Times, gives a list of 15 differences between the rapture and the glorious appearing or second coming of Jesus Christ. And there's a chart on the screen behind me, I hope you can see it. Now, I want to let you know that the staff is made available. All the charts and the images we're putting on the screen, they're downloadable on our website.

So, you can actually download the Daniel two, the Daniel nine, this chart and every week, we'll have different graphs and charts on the screen. But let me just go over these 15 differences quickly as you look at them on the screen between the rapture and the second coming. In the rapture, Christ comes number one to the air or in the air for zone.

In the second coming, Christ comes with his own to earth. In the rapture, Christ comes and raptures all Christians. In the second coming, no one is raptured. It's interesting in all the second advent verses, there's no reference to catching up or snatching up into the air. Now, in the third contrast, Christians in the rapture are taken to the father's house. But in the second coming, resurrected saints will not see the father's house.

Number four in the rapture, there's no judgment on earth and no tribulation taking place until the Antichrist is revealed. But in the second coming, Christ judges the inhabitants of the earth. And number five, the church is taken to heaven and the rapture, and the contrast is that the church cannot, the rapture cannot occur or the second coming cannot occur for seven years.

Number seven, no signs for the rapture of the church. Many signs in the second coming for his coming. As far as the rapture is concern, number eight, it's for believers only. The second coming affects the entire world. Many will see the Lord's return. It's going to be like the lightning out of the east, even into the west. In the rapture, there'll be a time of joy. In the second coming, it'll be a time of mourning. In the rapture, it'll be, before the day of wrath, the tribulation. And in the second coming will be immediately after the seven years of tribulation.

So, the rapture happens before the 70th week. The second coming happens at the end of the 70th week, and the 11th contrast, no mention of Satan surrounding the rapture, but in the second coming, Satan is bound in the abyss for 1,000 years. When Christ comes back on the second coming, He binds Satan for 1,000 years. Now, after the rapture, there'll be number 12, the judgment seat of Christ. In the second coming, no time or place for the judgment or the bema seat of Christ.

At the rapture 13, marriage of the Lamb will take place for the church, the bride. But at the second coming, His bride descends from heaven with Him. That's Revelation chapter 19. The 14th contrast is only his own see him. And at the second coming, every eye will see him. And then, the 15 contrast is the tribulation will begin technically not until the Antichrist is revealed, makes a covenant with Israel for seven years. That will be that last period of seven years for the nation of Israel.

But in the second coming, the contrast is, there will be a thousand, your kingdom of Christ upon earth known as the millennium or the kingdom age. Now, there's a lot of different ways we can contrast the two, but in the rapture, the church is only going to be a part of it, caught up to meet the Lord in the air. But in the second coming, we'll come back with Christ and it will be glorious, it will be wonderful. Jesus described it in Matthew 24, "As the lightning shines from the east even to the west, so shall the coming of the son of man be."

So, there are two different events, and I believe that they are separated by at least seven years, that 70th week of Daniel's prophecy. But let me move to my fifth and last point, and that is the confusion over the rapture. And again, this could be a whole message and I've actually dealt with it in a single message. All the issues that people have with the rapture.

The first question is, will only the Super Saints or the deeper life Christians or some of the church be raptured? It's what is known as what's called the partial rapture theory. And some people mistakenly propound this, that you're not going to get raptured even if you're Christian unless you are really walking in tight fellowship with the Lord. Now, if you're a Christian, you are in Christ. If you're not in Christ, you're not a Christian. If you're a Christian, He's the vine, you're the branches, you are united to Christ. You can't be ununited to Christ. If you are not in Christ, then you are not a Christian.

So, the rapture is not a reward for the Deeper Life Club. It's not a reward for the Super Saints. Should we be spiritual? Yes. Should we seek the Lord? Yes. Should we walk closely with the Lord? Yes, because we want the joy of salvation and we want to be a winning witness for Jesus Christ, and we want to stay close to the one we love. But we're not rewarded for our spirituality by being raptured. If that were true, we'd all walk around in fear thinking, "Have I prayed enough? Have I sought the Lord enough? Am I walking close enough to the Lord?"

I should motivate us to live in purity but not have a fear that will be left behind and we will not be raptured. The key phrase we sought in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 is that phrase in Christ. So, once you are in Christ, you are always in Christ. So, I believe the rapture will involve every person who has been born again, and thus become a member of the body of Christ. They will be raptured. But here's the second and more important question that is a confusing thing to some, and that is, will the church go through the tribulation?

Now, again, this is something that people debate about and discuss today and argue over even Christians about when will the rapture happen and will we go through the tribulation? Will we go halfway through? Will we go all the way through? Will we be in here on the earth during this time? There are three basic views of the tribulation and the rapture, and the first is called the post tribulational view. That is that the rapture happens at the end of the seven-year period. That's the post tribulational view.

The second view is called the mid-tribulational view, and that is that seven-year period, in the middle of that seven-year period, the rapture will take place and will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. Now, I could take the time and explain what they teach and why they believe that. I'm not here to do that tonight, but I don't believe that those views fit when you approach the prophetic scripture with a literal, historical interpretation of the Bible.

So, when you hold a premillennial view of Christ, second coming, as a result of a literal interpretation of the Bible, you're not spiritualizing or allegorizing the text, then it fits properly to see that the church is a parenthesis that's now gone on for over 2,000 years where God is drawing together a church, the body of Christ's bride out of Jew and Gentile were all becoming

one in Christ. And then, when he's done with the church, the church will be caught up to heaven. And then, that last seven-year period, that 70th week of Daniel will begin again when Christ will return at the end of the seven years.

But the third view and the one which I believe is most consistent with scripture is what's called the pretribulational view. And that is that the rapture will happen before the tribulation. Now, I'm going to give you six reasons and I have to go rapid fire. I've taught a whole message just on the reasons why the rapture happens before the tribulation. You could get the book, *The Rapture Questioned* by John Walvoord. You could get the book, *No Fear of The Storm* by Tim LaHaye. These are great books that talk about it.

But let me give you six reasons why I believe in a pretribulational rapture. The first is the unity of Daniel's 70th week. The purpose of that last seven-year period, even though it's divided into three and a half years, and three and a half years, it is one unit in the Daniel prophecy of the 70 weeks. It's the Antichrist confirming a covenant with the nation of Israel for one week, one seven-year period. And it all pertains to, it all applies to, it's all-purpose for Israel being brought to repentance and prepared for their Messiah, the Son of David as he will return in power and sit on the throne of David.

Yes, there will be the judgment of the Gentile world, and those who rejected Christ, but its purpose and design that 70th week of Daniel is not for the church. Church isn't seen there. The church isn't been there. It's not a part of that. You say, "Well, the parenthesis in the Bible that seems confusing." Let me mention one reference I think I did last week, Isaiah chapter 9, "For unto us the child is born, unto as the Son is given."

And then, he goes on to say, and the government shall be upon His shoulders. Do you know that that is His first and second coming, and one little text there? There's thousands of years as a gap. He doesn't explain the church age, he doesn't explain the body of Christ, but there's a gap right there. So, God has a purpose and a plan. Again, Romans 9, 10 and 11, Israel elected, Israel rejected Israel restored. And when the fullness of the Gentiles come in, God will take the nation of Israel who has temporarily and partially been blinded, and their eyes will be open.

The greatest revival in Jewish history will be the tribulation period. There'll be 144,000 Jews that will be sealed at the beginning of the tribulation, and they'll go out preaching the gospel, and many of them will be saved. So, what a glorious truth that is. But because of the unity of the 70th week, it's called *The Time of Jacob's Trouble*. I don't believe the church is here going to go through that. This is not part of God's plan to purify the church or to prepare the church to come to heaven. Jesus has purified the church and prepared the church quite well through His sacrifice on the cross.

Let me give you the second reason, I believe in a pretribulational rapture. It's the doctrine of imminency, the doctrine of imminency. Only the pretribulational view of the rapture before the tribulation supports this doctrine. Why? Because if the rapture were in the middle of the tribulation, we would see the Antichrist. We would see Him make a covenant with Israel for

seven years, and we would know that three and a half years the rapture is going to happen. Jesus said, "No man knows the day or the hour." If it were at the end of the tribulation, we would know the Lord was coming again.

So, when we lose the doctrine of imminency in John 14, when Jesus revealed he was coming again, Jesus didn't say signs and wonders will be happening and the moon will be turned to blood and stars will fall from heaven. And he didn't say those things will happen. He didn't describe it. He just said, "I'll come again and receive you to myself."

So, the doctrine of imminency is lost for the church if you believe the raptures in the middle or the end of the tribulation. And number three, Christians are not appointed to wrath. Write down, 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11, Christians are not appointed unto wrath. We are the children of light, 1 Thessalonians 5:5, and we are not appointed to wrath, 1 Thessalonians 5:9.

It's interesting that in the Old Testament when God was going to destroy the whole earth, and he found that Noah was a righteous man, Noah, his wife and his children were all saved in the ark. God spared Noah and destroyed the unbelieving world. It's interesting that Lot was spared when the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed. It's interesting that Rahab was spared. In the city of Jericho, God always spares His people or saves His people.

So, I don't believe that we're appointed to wrath, but we're appointed to obtain salvation. Study all of 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, especially verses 1 to 11. And you'll see that Paul is clearly teaching that we will not be here for the day of the Lord. It will not overtake us as the thief. Thieves come at the night. We're children of the day, and children of the light.

Here's number four, the Lord himself promised to deliver us. Yes, there is an actual promise in the Bible where the Lord promised the Church of Philadelphia, one of the seven churches in Revelation that they would be kept from that hour of temptation or trial of testing. Write down Revelation 3:10, God says, the Lord says to the church of Philadelphia, "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I will also keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth," Revelation 3:10.

I believe that is a direct promise to the Church of Philadelphia represented in all the churches that God will save us from that hour of tribulation or that 70th week of Daniel's prophecy. And then, number five, write it down. The church is absent on earth in Revelations chapters 4 to 18. And again, you can see why this, we could turn and do a study of the Book of Revelation, but just write it down from chapters 4 to chapter 18, no church on earth during the tribulation.

Matter of fact, in Revelation 4 and 5, guess where the church is? In heaven, praising the Lord. And Revelation 4:1, I believe is a reference to the rapture of the church. John heard a voice in heaven saying, "Come up here and I will show you things which must be here after or here to come." So, I believe in Revelation 4:1, the church is caught up. In Revelation 6, the tribulation begins on earth and the church is in heaven, never seen.

It's interesting in the first two chapters of the Book of Revelation in chapter two and three that

you have the repeated phrase, let the spirit hear what the spirit says to the churches, let the church hear what the spirit's saying. But when you go through the Book of Revelation, the spirit is speaking, but it's not to the churches any longer.

And you have a key to this in Revelation 1:9, where John is told to write the things you have seen, which is chapter 1 of Revelation, things which shall be hereafter. Chapters 2 and 3 of the things which are, excuse me, chapters 2 and 3. And then, the things which shall be hereafter, chapter 4:1-22. And last but not least, number six, the restrainer removed.

In order for the Antichrist to be revealed, read and study 2 Thessalonians 2:1-10. In order for the Antichrist to be revealed, which I believe the church must be removed because the Holy Spirit working through the church in the world as the light of the world, the 70th week of Daniel will be a time of darkness. And as the salt of the earth, it will be time of corruptness should be removed, so that the Holy Spirit is working in and through the church, the church will be caught up, the Holy Spirit will pull back his restraining force, and the Antichrist will be revealed.

So, I believe that for the Antichrist to be revealed, and this is how I want to conclude because I want it to segue into my message next week. We're going to look at the revelation of the Antichrist and the covenant with Israel for seven years and the elements that make up that time known as the tribulation period. Then, the following week, we'll look at the second coming.

So, the first event on God's calendar is for the church. And that first event involves the rapture of the church, the catching up of the church to meet the Lord in the air. But the restraining force will be removed when the church is taken out so the Antichrist can be revealed. So, we're not looking for the Antichrist, He can't be revealed until we're taken out. And you can read about it, as I said in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-10.

Now, my only question in closing tonight is, are you ready? Are you ready for the Lord's return? You say, "Well, Pastor John, how do I get ready?" And the answer is, again, very simple, repent and believe in Jesus Christ. You must be born again. You're not going to go to heaven just because you go to church. You can say, "Well, I'm not going to church anyway right now." You're in church tonight. But even though you go to church, even though you've been baptized, even though you say you believe in Jesus, only those who've been born again are true Christians.

You're not a Christian because you say you are. You're a Christian because you've been regenerated by the Holy Spirit. You've been given new life, and that's what really makes you ready for the Lord's return. It's not praying a certain number of hours a day. It's not fastening or it's not some right or ritual. It's the work of the spirit in your heart. It's God taking out your heart of stone, and giving you a new heart.

So, my question tonight is are you ready? Because the rapture could happen at any moment. We long for the day, we can reunite here in the church and worship together, but we may just be reunited in heaven and that would be fine with me too. We won't have to deal with mask. We won't have to deal with governors. We won't have to deal with issues. We'll be able to be with

the Lord forever and ever and ever and ever.

So, what does the church say? The church says, "Even so, come Lord Jesus." Amen. They used the word maranatha, the Lord comes. When they greeted one another, they said the word maranatha. We need to revive that as a church. We need to greet one another, "Maranatha, the Lord is coming." But if you haven't repented and believed in Jesus, if you didn't trust in him, then you need to pray right now this prayer, again, I'm going to lead you in a prayer of repentance.

This is how you get forgiven. This is how you get right. This is how... Even if you die, you'll go to be with the Lord, waiting for the resurrection of your body. So, if you haven't trusted Christ, the Bible said, whoever receives him, to them, he gives the right to become the children of God. Even to those who believe on his name and God loved you so much, He gave His son to die, so that if you believe in Him, you'll never perish, would have everlasting life.