

The Interval Between the Coming of the Lord for His Saints and With His Saints

by Arno Clemens Gaebelein

Arno Clemens Gaebelein preaches about the distinct interval between the coming of the Lord Jesus to take His saints up to Himself and His coming with His saints. The first stage of the Lord's coming, His coming for us, was first announced to the disciples in a moment of sorrow and love, emphasizing the importance of being gathered unto Him before His manifestation with us. The Thessalonian saints' sorrow over the fear of missing the first blessedness of meeting the Lord at His coming led to a new revelation about the Lord's return to receive His saints, providing comfort and removing their fear. The Word of the Lord assures believers of their exemption from the great tribulation and the last judgment, promising to keep them from the hour of temptation that will come upon all the world.

Description

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Transcript

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verse: "10" - text: "Revelation 13:6" bookId: "REV" chapter: "13" verse: "6" outline: - heading: "I" points: - "Introduction to the interval between the Lord's coming for and with His saints." - "Scriptural basis for understanding the rapture." - "The significance of Jesus' love in His promise." - heading: "II" points: - "The comfort of Jesus' words to His disciples." - "The role of the Thessalonian church in understanding the rapture." - "The importance of waiting for the Lord's return." - heading: "III" points: - "The sorrow of the Thessalonian saints and its implications." - "The assurance of resurrection for those who sleep in Christ." - "The unity of believers in the hope of Christ's return." - heading: "IV" points: - "The prophetic word regarding the Lord's return." - "The distinction between being kept from tribulation and being kept through it." - "The promise of exemption from the hour of temptation." faq: - q: "What is the main focus of the sermon?" a: "The sermon focuses on the interval between the Lord's coming for His saints and His coming with them, emphasizing the hope and comfort this brings." - q: "How does the sermon address the fears of the Thessalonian saints?" a: "It reassures them that those who have died in Christ will not miss the privilege of meeting the Lord at His coming." - q: "What role does love play in the anticipation of Christ's return?" a: "Love for Christ and fellow believers enhances the understanding and anticipation of His return." - q: "What does the sermon say about the nature of the rapture?" a: "The rapture is presented as a distinct event where believers are gathered to meet the Lord before His public return." quotes: - "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me." - "I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." - "Wherefore comfort one another with these words." applicationPoints: - "Reflect on the love of Christ and how it assures us of His return." - "Encourage one another with the hope of the rapture and the promise of being with the Lord." - "Cultivate a deeper understanding of unity among believers in anticipation of Christ's coming." keywords: - "coming of the Lord" - "rapture" - "Thessalonian saints" - "comfort" - "love of Christ" - "prophetic word" - "tribulation" - "unity of believers" ---

That there is a marked interval between the coming of the Lord Jesus to take His saints up to Himself, and His coming with His saints, cannot well be disputed. Indeed, if we had not in Scripture distinct instruction as to the first stage of our Lord's coming, His coming for us, and our rapture, it would have been impossible to understand those many passages which speak of His "coming with us," and our "manifestation with Him" (Zech. xiv:5, 1 Thes. iii:13, Jude 14, Col. iii:4). It is certainly necessary that there should be a "gathering unto Him," before there can be a coming or manifestation "with Him."

Then, the first of these is never brought into view in connection with the Lord's public testimony, nor does it ever appear in the Apostles testimony to the world. But this is in admirable harmony with all that is known of Jesus' love to His own. The first distinct announcement of His coming for us was given just at the moment and in the circumstances in which it might be expected. "On the night on which He was betrayed," when the traitor had "gone out," and "it was night," when for the first time the disciples began to feel the sorrow of the parting and absence of which He had often spoken; then it was that His love placed before them His coming again in its earliest stage and first object and intent, as the first point of their blessed hope. They had before ahead of "the days when the Bridegroom should be taken away," but, possibly occupied with the glory of the Kingdom, they had failed to realize what His absence meant. But it was very different now. He said, "Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me; and as I said to the Jews, Whither I go ye cannot come; so now I say to you" (Jno. xiii:33). There might still be very little intelligence among the disciples, but there was that night, through the word spoken, love's deep exercises towards His precious person: and consequently "sorrow filled their hearts because of what He said," and their common sorrow was, as usual, expressed by Peter. There was, we well know, much self-will and self-confidence mixing with his love to his Lord, but it was surely love that asked, "Lord, why cannot I

follow thee now?" We are thus entitled to say that it was just because He had roused into exercise, and drawn forth their expression of their love to Himself, that Jesus now for the first time declared to His disciples His coming again, in its first intent and act. "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; 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 unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also" (John xiv:1-3).

We could never have learned "the rapture of saints" from this passage alone; but without this passage accuracy as to the rapture of saints would be little worth. Accordingly, there is not any portion of the Bible to which suffering saints so often turn for comfort as that which we have just quoted. And this may show that all saints are, in their hearts, "waiting" or "looking for Him," though they may be ever so little taught, or ever so ill taught, respecting prophecy. At the same time it should be remembered that intelligence in the revelations made respecting His coming, as in all truth, can only be in proportion to our love of His person, for that is ever accompanied with lowly and loving reception of the word.

The comfortable words of Jesus "I will come again, and receive you to myself; that where I am ye may be also," were all that was needed, and all that could be profitable, for the time when they were uttered. The manner of His coming, and the particular mode of their reception by Him, they needed not then to know; it was sufficient to know that He Himself was coming for them, and that then they should be "forever with Him" But a time came when saints, waiting for their Lord's return, needed to be instructed more fully respecting the manner of His coming for them, and the place and mode of their reception to Himself. And it is not a little remarkable that the revelation of these details, was occasioned by a love and a sorrow closely akin to that which educed the first assurance that His second coming was to have for its first object, the "gathering together of His saints unto Himself."

Paul had for a few weeks preached the Word of God in Thessalonica, and a large number of souls had received that word "in much affliction and joy of the Holy Ghost." Paul was immediately driven from the city by Jewish hatred. But though thus speedily deprived of the apostle's presence, the church of the Thessalonians had become the brightest example of faith, love and patience; and there is reason to believe that, more distinctly than any others, the saints at Thessalonica assumed and maintained the attitude of expectants of the Lord's return. They "turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son from heaven" (1 Thess. i:9, 10). Modern millennialism too often neutralizes its own testimony, and obscures the hope for which it contends, by teaching that a long series of events announced in prophecy must precede the Lord's coming to receive His saints to Himself. The Thessalonian expectants knew nothing as necessarily intervening the fulfillment of their hope.

Nevertheless the joy of that hope was speedily beclouded with sorrow. Some of the waiting saints died and a new fear arose in the hearts of those who remained. This it was which became the occasion of a new revelation concerning the Lord's return to receive us to Himself: that revelation was brought forth as the solace of their sorrow, and effectually removed the fear which filled their souls, "But," says the apostle, "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them that are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as the others which have no hope" (1 Thess. iv:13).

What then was the fear which gave intensity to the sorrow of their bereavements? They feared that those who had fallen asleep would be detained in the grave when the Lord should come for His saints, and would thus be deprived of what they obviously esteemed the very highest privilege, presence at the meeting with the Lord at His coming. That this was their fear is quite certain, from the manner of its

removal. Those that "sleep in Jesus," they are taught, will lose nothing-- "them God will bring with Him" (v. 14); "we that are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them that are asleep" (v. 15); that is, we will not go before them to the meeting with the Lord.

Our little love, and our faint desires towards Christ and His saints, may find rebuke in contemplating the sorrow of these saints, though it was founded in ignorance. In the first place, that sorrow which brought out the consoling revelations respecting the Lord's return, discloses a state of heart toward that event which is, alas, too rarely found among modern Christians, though they be not "ignorant." It is clear enough that to the Thessalonian saints His coming again was the one only prospect which they held to be worthy of regard. Nor was this all. In their view it was the point of highest bliss to meet Himself at the earliest moment of His coming. They knew that He must be manifested in all His glory to the world; they knew that He would triumphantly assert His rights and reign over the earth; they knew that they were to be manifested and to reign with Him; they knew that His coming involved, and must be followed speedily, by all that could satisfy the desires of the child of God -- and in the expectation of all these glories and felicities they rejoiced -- but to meet Him who loved them, and whom they loved, at the first moment of His coming, was beyond all the felicity and glory involved, precious, because their hearts were fixed upon Himself. Thus to Him the precious thing is to have them "with Him where He is," and to them the precious thing was to be "ever with the Lord" (Jno. xiv:3, xvii:24, 1 Thess. iv:17). Andersen says that "the first moment of arrival at home is the bouquet of the whole voyage" and surely we may say that the first moment of our meeting of the Lord Himself is, more than all else, the longing desire of His tempest-tossed voyagers.

In the second place, the sorrow of the Thessalonian saints reveals a love to the members of the one body which has ever been too rare in the Church. They could not bear the thought that any of their brethren should miss that first blessedness for which they waited. This was in fine harmony with two things for which these saints were distinguished above other saints of their day. That they more clearly than others apprehended and valued their unity "in the Father and in the Son" (Jno. xvii:21-23), we judge from the style in which Paul twice designates their assembly, and which is used of no other -- "the Church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Thess, i:1, 2 Thess. i:1) -- for every careful student of the Epistles knows that the style of address to each Church closely corresponds with the spiritual condition of each. With respect to the unusual fervency of their love to their fellow saints, it is repeatedly testified by the Apostle, and indeed love to the fellow-members of the body must abound wherever there is full recognition of the unity of the body. And certainly the exquisite sensibility of their love appears in the sorrow concerning them that had fallen asleep. That these should be absent at the moment of their Lord's coming to receive them, that they "the living and remaining" should "prevent them that slept," was to them no slight detraction from the joy of their blessed hope. Our space forbids enlargement upon the lessons of love here suggested; but we would ask, whether the full knowledge and heart-reception of the unity of all saints, "in the Father, and in our Lord Jesus Christ," would not break up all those systems of prophetic interpretation which are founded upon the false principle that many who are in Christ will be left behind, to suffer in the great tribulation, when the Lord shall gather His saints together unto Himself? The passage before us ought to be a final answer to all such teaching. The distinctive hope is not for those that have clear and intelligent views of the Lord's coming, not for those who have escaped from erroneous thoughts of the end of all things, but for them who "believe that Jesus died and rose again" for them that "sleep in Jesus" (v. 14). And the extent of the terms "we" and "them" -- "We which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them" (v. 17) -- must coincide with the former terms.

We are indebted then to the love and the sorrow of the Thessalonian saints for "the Word of the Lord" by which the Apostle at once removed their fear and solaced their sorrow, and furnished the whole Church with comfort concerning them that sleep in Jesus. He had said, "I will come again and receive you to myself." We now learn that "the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven" putting forth resurrection power; and that "the dead in Christ" shall not only not be left behind, but "shall rise first." "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air" (v. 16, 17). In this manner He will "receive us to Himself." He had indicated the love that could not do without us, by saying that He would come to receive us, "that where He is, there we may be also;" and now we learn that, He descending, and we caught up to meet Him -- "so shall we be ever with the Lord" (v. 17). "Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (v. 18).

This it is evident, is the first point of our hope. "The day of the Lord" will bring consolation to Israel, and joy to all the earth, but we look for the "day dawn;" to those of Israel who fear His name, "the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in His wings," but we shall see Him first as the "Bright and Morning Star;" creation shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption, because of our manifestation, when we appear with Christ, but He will pause in His coming to "receive us to Himself" that we may be "manifested with Him in glory"

But is it not certain that the prophetic word indicates that most important events, and events involving a considerable period for their completion, must transpire before the manifestation of the Lord Jesus? and would not this, in the view that has been presented above, imply a long interval between the coming of the Lord for His saints, and His coming with them? We believe it is even thus that we are taught in the Word, only that the length of time supposed to be necessary for the fulfillment of events, is often much exaggerated, in consequence of overlooking the plainly announced determination of the Lord that, in "the time of the end," He will bring all things to their consummation with a speediness hitherto unknown in His way with men; though this has been often illustrated in His past judgments, as by the flood, and the destruction of Sodom. This peculiar feature of the close of this dispensation ought to receive more attention than it does. We cannot enter into it now, but one word suffices both for proof, and for suggestion of other proof. "For He will finish the work" close the account -- "and cut it short in righteousness: because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth" (Rom. ix:28; compare v. 29, and see Isa. x:22, 23, xxviii:22, Zeph. 1:14, 15).

With respect, however, to the interval, whether long or short, between the Lord's receiving of His saints in the air (1 Thess. iv.), and His revelation with them, in the execution of His judgments (2 Thess. i.), introductory to "the day of the Lord" (1 Thess. v.), we would especially direct attention to the testimony of Christ which plainly declares that those who now look for Him shall not be left in the midst of the final swift judgments which are to come on all the earth; and then, very briefly, point out the analogy which this interval between the coming for the saints, and the manifestation with them, bears to the mode of His first coming and manifestation.

It may be observed that though the taking away of the Church is not announced as being accomplished by rapture, in those remarkable epitomes of prophecy which were provided for us by our Lord (we refer especially to those contained in Matt. xxiv, Mark xiii, Luke xxi), yet the thing itself is there, both by implication and by promise. Thus, whenever the Lord reaches the announcement of His coming in glory and power, He implies the absence of the Church by saying, not "Then shall ye see" -- but, "Then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with great power and glory" (Luke xxi:27). And the Lord's use of the third person here becomes all the more striking when it is observed that in the next verse He returns

to the use of the second person. This implied absence of the Church from the scene to which He comes, is in perfect harmony with the fact that they, having been caught up to meet Him, come with Him.

We are not, however, left to inference upon this matter. The Faithful and True Witness Himself sets before us the assurance that we shall not be left on the earth during the period of its surpassing tribulation. That "the time of the end" shall be "a time of trouble," a time of "great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world, no, nor ever shall be," is plainly and frequently declared (Dan. xii:1, Matt. xxiv:21, Jer. xxx:7). That, when this tribulation begins, it shall continue till the revelation of the Lord from heaven, is equally clear. But we have Jesus' word for it that we shall not be left to the unparalleled affliction of the "consumption determined upon the whole earth." Here is His Word, on which we rest, "Watch ye, therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy," or (as we suppose all editors now read) "that ye may prevail to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke xi:36). It is one thing to be in the tribulation and to be "delivered out of it," quite another to "escape all these things" -- the things which constitute the unequalled affliction of that time. The former is the destiny of the remnant of Jacob (comp. Jer. xxx:7, Isaiah i:9, x:20-23, Rom. ix:27-28, Matt. xxiv:21, 22), the other is the destiny of those who are to be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and "so" to be with Him when He comes to "deliver Jacob out of his trouble" (comp. Zech. xiv:1-5).

Yet again, to quote but one more text, the Lord assures us of our certain exemption from the last judgment, with which He will righteously afflict all that dwell on the earth. "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth" (Rev. ii:10). Our exemption from the greatest tribulation is pledged in every syllable of this most precious promise.

First the promise is given to him who "keeps the word of the patience of Christ;" and that is characteristic of every believer (comp. 2 Thess. iii:5, Heb. x:36, 37, Rev. i:10). It may also be observed that he who "keeps the word of His patience" is further to be identified with "him that overcometh," or the overcoming one" (v. 12); and this victory is sure to every believer, as the writer of the Apocalypse is himself careful to assure us. "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God" (1 John v:4, 5). We are the more careful to note this because the term under consideration has been used as though it described the attainment of a few, instead of the common triumph of all believers; and, then, the promise under notice is viewed as sustaining the notion that the rapture to the meeting of our descending Lord is to be only the privilege of superior attainment. Before leaving the words, "Him that overcometh," we may observe that if, as we have already assumed, we are, in Luke xxi 136, instead of "that ye may be accounted worthy," to read, "that ye may prevail to escape all these things" there is confirmation of what is, for other reasons, sufficiently clear, namely, that the prospect out in the Lord's words by Luke, and the promise given by John in the letter to Philadelphia, are exactly parallel. We return to the latter.

Secondly, The promise is, "I will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth" This promise has been, and by many whose judgment we highly esteem, viewed as meaning no more than that saints will be kept from final injury by the temptation; in other words, kept safely in it, and carried safely through it. But, not to say that such deliverance always has been, and always must be sure to all saints, surely to be "kept from" is much more than to be "kept in" temptation. And this is more distinctly marked in the original than it appear in the English version. "I will keep thee out of the hour" is the literal translation of the promise. Moreover, we must not overlook the

peculiar fulness of the promise. It is not only that we shall be kept from "the temptation;" but it is that we shall be kept from "the hour of temptation," If words can convey promise, we have here the promise of our complete separation from the world's great tribulation, and not only from the trouble, but from the time of the trouble.

Lastly, It will not be deemed, by any who reverence the Word of Christ, without significance that those who are to be kept out of the hour of temptation are set in full contrast to those who are in "the hour" and the subjects of "the temptation"-- "all the world" "them that dwell upon the earth" It is surely impossible to understand how saints who are left in "all the world" can be kept from the hour of temptation which comes "upon all the world" and still more impossible to conceive how they can be dwelling on the earth, and yet be kept out of the hour of temptation which tries "them that dwell on the earth." But let the word of the Lord concerning the rapture be simply received at its own value, and all is plain. When "the hour of temptation comes upon all the world, to try them that dwell on the earth" they will be no longer here, but will be numbered among "them that dwell in heaven" (Rev. xiii:6).

Other events are to transpire synchronously with the great tribulation, or to contribute to its terrible anguish. Such are the maturity of the mystery of iniquity, the rise and reign of the Son of perdition, the restoration of unrepentant Israel to Jerusalem and Judea, with their most flagrant rejection of their King, in the presence of a final testimony to Him, and their last frightful apostasy from the God of their fathers (though a small remnant will turn to the Lord). The examination of the prophetic word on these and kindred topics would add confirmation to all we have said concerning the distinction between the two stages of our Lord's second coming, and would especially show that a marked interval must be put between our "gathering together with Christ," and the setting in of "the day of the Lord." But all this we must for the present leave unnoticed; and close with some brief remarks concerning the analogy to which we before referred --that between the Lord's coming in humiliation, and His coming in glory-- in respect of the different stages of each.

It has sometimes been alleged that the distinction which we make, and which we believe the Scriptures make between the Lord's coming for us, and His coming with us, involves not only a second, but a third advent. The distinction would not be so regarded if the facts respecting the first advent, and the manner in which its stages are spoken of in the Gospels, were kept in mind. God sent His Son into the world; He "came forth from the Father, and came into the world" He came by birth of the Virgin. He was in the world, but was for thirty years unmanifested. During that long period His coming was unknown, except to the few, such as the magi who came and worshipped Him, the shepherds of Bethlehem, Simeon and Anna, and those that "looked for redemption in Israel" (Luke ii.). Others might hear of it and wonder; Herod and all Jerusalem might and did hear of His coming; and we know the result. "Herod was troubled and all Jerusalem with Him." But after the wicked king had accomplished the crime, by which he doubtless thought he had rid himself of the rightful heir of David's throne, the testimony to his coming in the earlier stage of it was unheeded. The Messiah had come, but remained unmanifested. And this there can be no doubt was according to the Divine plan.

At length, some thirty years having elapsed, John heralded His coming in its second stage; and though the herald knew well that his Lord had been long in the world, he called His manifestation His coming. "There cometh one after me who is preferred before me: for He was before me. And I knew Him not: but that He should be made manifest unto Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water" (John i:30, 31). In like manner, when recording the Lord's entry into Jerusalem, riding on an ass, two Evangelists, by quotation from Zechariah's prophecy, present that act as His coming: "All this was done that it might be fulfilled

which was spoken by the prophet saying, Tell ye the daughter of Zion, Behold thy king cometh unto thee" (Matt. xxi:5, John xii:15). While the other two Evangelists inform us that the children and the disciples, with the Lord's own approbation, hailed the same entry into Jerusalem as the "coming" spoken of in Psalm cxviii. (Mark xi:9, Luke xix:38).

Of course, in most respects the first and second advent of our Lord must be contrasted; but the analogy, in many particulars, is just such as is suited to preserve the connection between the two, which, in the ancient prophets, was spoken of as one (see Zech. ix:9, 10, and Mic. v:1-4, Isa. lxi:2). At any rate, as no one would call the coming of the Lord to "those that waited for consolation in Israel," and His "manifestation" to the nation, two comings, neither is it necessary to regard the Lord's coming to receive us, and epiphany with us, as two. May the Lord, in His infinite condescension, use what we have said to quicken our desires for His presence, and to give intensity to our love of His appearing.-- Grace and Truth.

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