

The Rapture!

by Chuck Smith

Chuck Smith's sermon emphasizes the hope and urgency of the Rapture, encouraging Christians to be prepared for Christ's imminent return.

Scripture: Matthew 24:32-35, Luke 21:28, 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, 2 Corinthians 5:2, Philippians 1:21-23, Philippians 3:20-21, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, 1 Thessalonians 5:9, James 5:7-8, Revelation 4:1

Topics: "Readiness for Christ's Return", "The Rapture"

Description

Chuck Smith emphasizes the profound difference between death for Christians and non-Christians, describing it as a transition to be with Christ, which is far better. He explains the concept of the Rapture, where believers will be suddenly taken up to meet the Lord, and reassures that this event is distinct from the Second Coming. Smith encourages believers to be watchful and ready for the Rapture, highlighting the signs of the times, particularly the re-establishment of Israel. He warns against complacency and urges individuals to prepare their hearts for Christ's return, emphasizing the urgency of accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior. The sermon concludes with a call to readiness, reminding listeners of the hope and joy found in being part of the Church at the time of the Rapture.

Transcript

Death to the Christian is so different than to the non-Christian that it's incorrect even to use the same term. For the Christian death is really a transition.

Paul said, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better" (Philippians 1:21-23). Paul said that we who are in this body do groan, earnestly desiring to be delivered; not that we would be unclothed but that we might be clothed with that body which is from heaven (II Corinthians 5:2).

Speaking to the Thessalonians concerning their loved ones who had already died in Christ, Paul said,

I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them who are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as those who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not [precede] them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up

together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words (I Thessalonians 4:13-18, emphasis added).

Some people would ridicule the idea or concept of the Rapture of the Church. They declare that the word "rapture" isn't even found in the Bible. It all depends on which Bible you're reading. The phrase "caught up" in I Thessalonians 4:17 is the Greek word *harpazo*, which actually means "to be snatched away violently." The Latin equivalent of *harpazo* is the verb *rapio*, "to take away by force." In the Latin Vulgate, one of the oldest Bibles in existence, the appropriate tense of *rapio* appears in verse 17. *Raptus* is the past participle of *rapio*. Our English words "rapt" and "rapture" stem from this past participle. Although "rapture" isn't in the King James Bible, the basic word does appear in the Latin Vulgate.

What is meant by the Rapture?

The Rapture refers to that event where Jesus Christ snatches His Church out of this world. It shall happen suddenly without any notice. The Rapture of the Church and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ are completely different. At the Rapture Jesus is coming for His saints.

In I Corinthians 15:51-52 Paul said, "Behold, I show you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will be changed [metamorphosis, a change of body] in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye." You won't even realize it's happened until it's all over. Suddenly, you're in the presence of the Lord with all the church!

We the Church will be changed. Paul wrote to the Philippians,

For our [citizenship] is in heaven, from whence we look for the Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ: Who will change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious [image] (Philippians 3:20-21).

Describing the metamorphosis Paul wrote to Corinth, "For this corruption must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality" (I Corinthians 15:53). At the Second Coming we will return with Jesus Christ. Jude 14 tells us, "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints."

When Will the Rapture take place?

Jesus said, "No man knows the day or hour..." For us to presume to declare some date or some hour would be an unscriptural presumption. If we say we know the hour, we're boasting of knowledge superior to Christ's when He was upon the earth.

Although we do not know the exact time of the Rapture, in I Thessalonians 5 Paul said,

But of the times and seasons, brethren, you have no need that I write unto you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord is coming as a thief in the night. For when they will say, Peace and safety; then comes sudden destruction... But ye, brethren, are not in darkness that that day should overtake you as a thief (emphasis added).

The Bible is saying that the Rapture shouldn't come to you as a surprise.

Why Should "That Day" Not Overtake Us as a Thief?

God has given to us the warnings that would precede the coming of Jesus Christ. One of the greatest signs to the world today is the re-establishment of the nation Israel. For years Bible scholars had looked forward to the regathering of the nation Israel based on many Scriptures (including Matthew 24:32), and

applying expositional constancy (fig tree or figs in parables symbolize the nation Israel). Skeptics ridiculed this prophecy. Never in history had a nation been born out of the past, but a miracle has taken place and a nation has been reborn. God has reestablished Israel among the family of nations on the earth. God has fulfilled His promise even as He said He would.

Psalms 102:16 declares, "When the Lord shall build up Zion, He shall appear in His glory." Because the Lord is building up Zion, the orthodox Jew today is looking for his Messiah. We are too! We're looking forward to this fulfillment of God's promise the coming again of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.

Now learn a parable of the fig tree; when its branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, you know that summer is nigh even know that it [My coming] is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled" (Matthew 24:32-35).

What "Generation"?

Not the generation Christ was talking to, because they've passed - but the generation that saw the fig tree budding forth. The coming of Jesus Christ is "even at the doors." The rebirth of Israel should be a sign to every child of God!

Jesus said throughout the rest of Matthew 24, "Watch... be ye also ready." That was the constant warning to the Church: watch and be ready. In Luke 21:28 when Jesus was speaking of these same things, using again the parable of the fig tree, He said, "And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh."

Will the Rapture precede the Great Tribulation?

There are arguments and Scriptures that people can present for pre-, mid-, and post-Tribulation theories. My personal opinion is that Jesus will come before the Great Tribulation to rapture His Church. I don't believe that the Church will go through the Great Tribulation period.

In I Thessalonians 5:9 Paul wrote, "For God has not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ." Paul said the same in Romans 5:9 - we've not been appointed to wrath. Jesus, in the whole context of the Tribulation, said, "Pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:36). My prayer is that I will be accounted worthy to escape all of these things that are going to come to pass upon the earth.

The Lord divided the Book of Revelation into three sections: "[1] Write the things which thou hast seen, [2] and the things which are, [3] and the things which shall be after these things [meta tauta]" (Revelation 1:19). John, in obedience to the commandment, wrote in chapter I the vision of Christ that he saw on the island of Patmos. In chapters 2 and 3 he wrote of the Church and the message of Jesus to the seven churches. Let's look at two of these messages where Jesus made reference to His coming again.

1. The church of Thyatira had introduced the worship of idols within the church. Jesus said,

I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel... to seduce my servants to commit fornication... I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds (Revelation 2:20-22, emphasis added).

The unrepentant church of Thyatira. which had gone into spiritual "fornication" (idolatry and saint-worship), was to be cast into the Great Tribulation unless, the Lord said, she repented.

2. To the church of Philadelphia in Revelation 3:10 Jesus said, "Because you have kept the word of my patience, I also will keep you from the hour of temptation which is coming to try them who dwell upon the earth." The Rapture can happen at any moment - and it's exciting to realize that as a Christian you may never finish reading this article! After the close of the messages to the churches, Revelation 4:1 begins and ends with the Greek phrase *meta tauta*. "After these things," John said, "behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was a trumpet saying unto me, Come up hither, and I will show you things which must be after these things [*meta tauta*]" (emphasis added).

After What "Things"?

Jesus spoke of Church things in chapters 2 and 3. These must be the things that will take place after the Church is taken out of the earth. I believe that 4:1 of the Book of Revelation, is the place of the Rapture of the Church. That "voice" in heaven and "trumpet" are the same as in I Thessalonians 4:16. With the trump of God and the archangel saying, "Come up hither", we the Church will be gathered together with the Lord in the heavens.

What Happens After Revelation 4:1?

John describes the heavenly scene in chapter 4. In chapter 5 he saw the scroll with seven seals in the right hand of Him Who is sitting upon the throne. An angel proclaimed with a loud voice. "Who is worthy to open the scroll, and to loose its seals?" John began to sob convulsively, because no one in heaven or earth nor under the earth was found worthy to even look upon the scroll (Revelation 5:2-4).

Then one of the elders said, "Weep not, behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals." John turned and saw Jesus as a Lamb that had been slain, "and He came forth and He took the scroll out of the right hand of Him Who sat upon the throne." Immediately, they brought forth the "vials full of odors which are the prayers of saints. And they sang a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open its seals; for Thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and people, and tongue, and nation; and made us unto our God kings and priests, and we shall reign with Him upon the earth" (Revelation 5:5-10). Notice the song that is being sung.

Who Can Sing That Song?

It's not the song of Israel and the covenant relationship with God. People from all the families of the earth, not just one family of Abraham, are singing. It's a people who have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ. Only the Church can sing that song.

In Revelation 5:11 after Jesus takes the scroll, John said that innumerable multitudes, "ten thousand times ten thousands" worship the Lamb, declaring His worthiness to receive the honor, and the authority, and the glory. In Revelation 6 Jesus proceeds to loose the seals of the scrolls. With the very first seal there comes forth the white horse rider, "going forth conquering, and to conquer." This, I believe, is the entrance of the Antichrist, because he's followed by wars, death, famine, and desolation. Certainly, the Second Coming of Christ isn't going to be followed by such events, but by the glorious establishment of the Kingdom.

Now, Where's The Church?

Before the Tribulation ever begins the Church is in heaven singing and praising the Lord for His worthiness to take the scroll and loose the seals. The Tribulation doesn't start until the seven seals begin to be broken.

Then Why All The Confusion Concerning Pre-Trib, Mid-Trib, And Post-Trib Rapture?

In Revelation 13:7, reference is made to the beast, "...making war with the saints," and he is given power to overcome them during the middle of the Tribulation period. Jesus in Matthew 24:29-31 said about His Second Coming,

Immediately after the tribulation of those days... they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

By defining "the saints" and "His elect" as being the Church you would have the Church in the Tribulation period. I believe "His elect" is a reference to the nation Israel, if you read it in context.

Christ said, "Pray that your flight be not in the winter, or on the Sabbath day" when fleeing out of Jerusalem (Matthew 24:16-20). How many in the Church expect to be in Jerusalem fleeing when the Antichrist sets up his image within the temple? How many of you would be praying, "O God, don't let it be on the Sabbath day"? The Church doesn't keep the Sabbath day; that's God's covenant relationship with Israel. The fact is that Israel is "His elect." He's going to gather them back into their land for the Kingdom Age at His return.

As Paul said in Romans 11:25-26,

...that blindness in part [has] happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.

"The saints" of Revelation 13:7 are also the same. They are God's nation Israel which He has now established again in a priority basis upon the earth during this last seven-year Tribulation period.

The mistake and the confusion regarding the Church's place in the last times arise out of a misunderstanding of God's full prophecies concerning the nation Israel. Israel will be going through the Great Tribulation. This will be the time of Jacob's troubles spoken of in Scripture (Jeremiah 30:7). This will be the time when, as even Jesus said, "You will not see Me henceforth, until you shall say, Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord" (Matthew 23:29). After the Great Tribulation period Israel will be saying, "O, blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord!" Jesus shall return again with His Church at the Second Coming of Christ.

Zechariah the prophet said, "And one shall say unto him; What are these wounds in your hands? Then He shall answer; Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends" (Zechariah 13:6). Thus, the glorious first recognition of Jesus as Israel's Messiah when He comes the second time with the Church to establish His reign upon the earth.

What Should I Do As A Christian?

In light of the fact that the Lord might come even today, there are certain things we should do. But first, let me tell you what you shouldn't do. Don't quit your job, sell your house, or see how much money you can borrow figuring you won't have to pay it back. Jesus said, "Occupy until I come" (Luke 19:13). He intends for us to go right on in our work.

Jesus said, "Watch" (Matthew 24:42). You should be watching. In Hebrews it says, "And unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time" (Hebrews 9:28). You should be ready. Jesus said, "Therefore be ye also ready; for in such an hour as you think not the Son of man cometh" (Matthew 24:44). Amos cried out, "Prepare to meet thy God" (Amos 4:12). You need to prepare. That preparation is in giving your heart and life to Jesus Christ, receiving His forgiveness and the blotting out of your sins and transgressions. And then wait. James said, "Be patient therefore, brethren, to the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman is waiting be also patient, establish your hearts" (James 5:7-8). II Peter 3:3-4 tells us that in the last days there would be scoffers that would come and say, "Where's the promise of His coming?" But "God is not slack concerning His promises, as some men count slackness; but He is faithful to us" (v. 9).

The Question At This Point Is, "Are You Ready?"

Consider the Lord proclaiming today, "This is the end for the church! You have finished your witness. Come home!" Would you be gathered with the church to meet the Lord in the air, or would you be down here scratching your head wondering what's going on?

How much better to go with the Church than to be left behind to face the Tribulation and all the horror coming upon the earth. Why make it tough for yourself when the Lord wants to make it easy on you? Why not just open your heart and life to Jesus Christ now? Why not just receive Him as your Lord and Saviour and, as He said, be ready. What do you need to be ready? Jesus Christ dwelling in your heart and in your life.

What About Those Who Miss?

At times there may be a hesitancy in our hearts concerning the coming of Jesus Christ because of what will happen to our unsaved family members when He returns.

Once we've been caught up, many of our loved ones, who have been hassled by our witness and upset with our testimony, will realize that they've actually missed the opportunity of being raptured with the Church. As a result, they'll become dead serious with God and will choose to be martyred during the Great Tribulation period by refusing to take the mark of the beast. They will choose death in preference to the mark and, thus, will be saved (Revelation 20:4).

In Revelation 7:9-14, John saw in heaven "a great multitude which no man could number, of all nations and kindreds clothed with white robes" singing of salvation. The elder said to John, "These are they which came up out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (emphasis added). In Revelation 6:9-11 under the fifth seal, these souls martyred during the Tribulation period are waiting for their opportunity to enter the heavenly scene. They are told to wait a little longer until the total number be slain as they were slain.

Being a Tribulation saint is a hard way to come. As Jesus said, "For there will be great tribulation..." such as the world never has seen before or ever will see again (Matthew 24:21). Why wait? Why slough off your

chances of being in the glorious excitement of being with the Lord when he catches up the Church?

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