

The Truth of the Pre-Tribulation Rapture (1)

by David Guzik

The pre-tribulation rapture is a doctrine that teaches that believers will be caught up to be with Jesus before the tribulation, providing a sense of comfort and security.

Duration: 56:32

Scripture: Daniel 12:11, Matthew 24:21, Matthew 24:36-39, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14

Topics: "End Time Prophecy", "Divine Judgment"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the horrific time of divine judgment that will occur in the future. He refers to the book of Revelation, which vividly describes the seven seals, seven bowls, and seven trumpets that will bring about this judgment. The preacher emphasizes that these judgments will be universal and include the destruction of vegetation and sea creatures, as well as a pollution of the oceans. He also draws parallels to the days of Noah, where people were going about their daily lives unaware of the impending flood. The preacher concludes by reminding the audience that the coming of Jesus will be unexpected, and urges them to be watchful.

Transcript

We're taking a few weeks out on Wednesday nights and we're considering topics having to do with prophecy with God's unfolding plan of the ages in the church and tonight we're going to talk about something that's popularly known as the rapture of the church. Last week we spoke about the 70th week of Daniel and how that sets really a background and a foundation for understanding God's prophetic plan. But now we want to consider this great event that is popularly known as the rapture of the church.

I'd like you to turn in your Bibles to 1 Thessalonians chapter 4. We're going to begin at verse 13. Now you should know that the word rapture is nowhere found in the Bible or at least in the Bible version that you have in front of you here this evening. But the idea of the rapture is expressed very clearly in 1 Thessalonians 4. Again, we're beginning here at verse 13 where Paul says, but I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. Paul here is speaking to the Thessalonian Christians.

He was among the Thessalonians just for a few weeks, but in the few weeks that he was there, he thought it was very important to teach them about prophecy and about the coming of the Lord. So when Paul taught the Thessalonians about these things, they got excited. They got excited about the idea of Jesus's soon return.

Well, as they got excited about that idea, it ran into some difficulty for them when some of their Christian friends passed on when they died and they worried about it. They thought, you know, here we are expectantly waiting the return of Jesus. We're so excited about his return.

And here these dear believers have passed away and they don't get to be here when Jesus returned. I suppose they're at a disadvantage. They miss out on this great event.

Paul wants the Thessalonians to understand that those who die before the return of Christ don't miss out on the glory of the resurrection, nor do they miss out on returning with Christ in glory. And that's his whole point there in verse 15. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.

Verse 16, for the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God and the dead in Christ will rise first. In other words, there will be a resurrection of the dead. And those who have passed on before will share in it as well.

When Jesus comes, we're also told here that he'll come personally. The Lord himself will descend and come with a shout. It's great to understand that the ancient Greek word that's used here for shout with the same word used for a ship's master to command his rowers or a commander speaking to his soldiers.

There's the ring of authority. There's the ring of urgency in this word shout. By the way, it says that he'll come with the voice of an archangel.

Francis doesn't mean that the Lord himself is an archangel. The only person described as an archangel in the Bible is an angelic being known as Michael. You'll find that in Jude chapter one.

Of course, there's only one chapter to the book of Jude, but Jude verse nine. What Paul means that Jesus will come with the voice of an archangel is that when Jesus comes, he'll come in the company of prominent angels and he'll come with a trumpet sounding as well. Did you notice that there in verse 16 with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God? Now, in the Old Testament, trumpets were used for different purposes.

Sometimes trumpets were used to sound the alarm for war. They would throw the enemies of God into a panic and that the trumpet would be the bugle call, so to speak, for battle. At other times, trumpets were used to assemble God's people.

And that's the idea of this trumpet here, is that a trumpet that's used to assemble together the people of God. And then we see here that in this great assembling together, the dead in Christ rise first. This brings up a big question.

What is the status of the dead in Christ right now? Do they have resurrection bodies or not? And in some ways, this is a very difficult question to answer. Some people have the idea that those who have gone before us in the Lord are in heaven right now, but they're in some sort of disembodied state. And on the day of the rapture, that's when they will receive the resurrection body.

Other people have the idea that perhaps they receive the resurrection body right away. And there's a third group that perhaps believes that they receive sort of a temporary body that lasts them until they receive the resurrection body. These things are sort of difficult to understand.

But one thing that we do know for sure is that the dead in Christ are not lying in the grave in some kind of soul sleep or suspended animation. No, that's not the case at all. Paul made it very clear that to be absent from the body means to be present with the Lord.

You'll find that in 2nd Corinthians chapter five, verse eight. So either the present dead in Christ are with the Lord in a spiritual body awaiting their final resurrection body, or it's very possible that because of the nature of timeless eternity, they've received their resurrection bodies already because they live in the internal. Now, you regard all that as sort of secondary to the point where we want to consider, which really is revealed to us in verse 17, where we read, then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord.

Let me read that to you again, just because it's such a remarkable statement. Then we who are alive, in other words, those believers who are alive, remaining on the earth until this time that Paul speaks of, we will be caught up together with them, with the believers who have gone before, and we're going to meet the Lord in the air and then we'll always be with the Lord. That simple phrase, there are two words caught up is where we get our English word rapture.

The idea behind the Greek words translated caught up there means to seize or to carry something off by force. It's the notion of a sudden swoop and of a force that can't be resisted. And then we're going to be caught up and then we're going to meet the Lord in the air.

That's a beautiful term in the ancient Greek language that that phrase to me, it was used as a technical term to describe the official welcoming of honored guests. And this great passage in front of us is the basis of the New Testament doctrine of the rapture, the catching away of believers to be with Jesus. Now, the word rapture is not in your English version in First Thessalonians 4:17.

Neither is it in the ancient Greek version. It's not the ancient Greek word rapture. The word rapture comes from the Latin Vulgate, which was the main translation of the Bible used in the Christian world for some thousand years.

The Latin Vulgate translates that phrase caught up with the Latin word rapturous. And we get our English word rapture from that Latin word rapturous. And so when we're talking about the rapture, we're talking about the catching away, being caught up.

If you want to call it the great catching away instead of the rapture, you're free to do so. It doesn't really matter. It's the idea that's important here, not so much the specific word that we apply to it.

But friends, when you think about this idea, when you think about the fact that this statement that Paul made under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit about what a dramatic, indeed, what a fantastic idea it is. He speaks of Christian flying upward, being caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. It's amazing to think about.

That one day Christians will just be walking the earth. It'll be a day like any other day to them. And they'll hear a trumpet sound and they will be seized up from this earth to meet the Lord God in heaven.

Friends, that's the rapture of the church. And and might I say that if we just think about it rationally for a moment, this is such a wild doctrine that we wouldn't believe it unless the Bible told it to us. I wouldn't believe it unless the Bible clearly stated it.

In many ways, it's easier to believe Jesus coming back to the earth and reigning in triumph and glory, of course, than it is to think about us being spirited away. I mean, transported, elevated, levitated, so to speak, off of this earth to meet the Lord in the air. But it's exactly what the scriptures teach here.

There's really not much controversy about the idea that that we're going to be caught up because this is what the Bible so clearly teaches. And it seems fantastic to us. Friends, it's not any more fantastic than the idea that the Lord God in heaven added humanity to his deity, came as a baby, lived among men, did miracles, that he died on a cross, that he rose from the dead, that he lived in us.

This is just the kind of fantastic miracle that we would expect from a miracle working Lord. But make no mistake about it. Paul's language here is so straightforward.

It's so free from figurative speech that there's no missing his intent. You can just hone right on in on the fact that Paul means that there will come a day when Christians on this earth will be caught up, seized up, taken away by force, if you will, to meet the Lord Jesus in the air. And if you notice what he says so wonderfully in verse 17, he says, and thus we shall always be with the Lord.

The manner in which Jesus will gather us to himself is impressive by just taking us and grabbing us and taking us to heaven. But friends, the main point of this is that whatever the state of the Christian is, whether dead or alive at the Lord's coming, that when the Lord comes for them, they will always be with the Lord. That is the great reward of heaven, of course, to be with Jesus and to know that death can't break our unity with Jesus.

Death can't even break our unity with other Christians will be with them as well. And one last thing before we move on to another idea, verse 18 says that therefore comfort one another with these words. You see, Paul tells them that this idea of the rapture should be a comfort to Christians.

It is not escapism at all to look at the rapture as a comfort. To look at this great catching away as something that we can be confident in and find a sense of security and hope and trust before the Lord. And he says that we should comfort one another with these words.

See, friends, the truth of the return of Jesus for his people and the eternal union of Jesus and his people. It's to be a source of great comfort for Christians. And it's not escapism to say, hang in there one day, we'll all be with Jesus and all of this will be over.

That's not escapism. That's the essence of faith for those who don't who don't belong to this world. But rather who who live with their hearts and their minds in eternity.

Now. The fact of the rapture is not in great dispute among Christians today. But the timing of the rapture is a matter of great dispute among Christians today.

You know, in the 15 minutes that I've already spoken to you here this evening, I've just pretty much laid out for you the fact of the rapture from First Thessalonians chapter four. And as I said, that's not a matter of great controversy in the church today. Nevertheless, the idea of when the rapture will occur is of great interest.

And it's a great debate, especially it has relevance to this question. When will the rapture of the church happen in relation to the 70th week of Daniel? Again, we know that the 70th week of Daniel still remains for the fulfillment of God's plan of the ages. And that when the 70th week of Daniel, when this last seven year period ends, we know as well that human history as we know it will end and Jesus Christ will bring in his kingdom with everlasting righteousness and power and glory.

Now, when does the rapture happen in relation to that 70th week? There are four basic viewpoints on this matter. First of all, there are those who believe that the rapture of the church happens immediately before the 70th week of Daniel begins. There are people who believe that the rapture of the church happens right in the middle of the 70th week of Daniel.

There are people who believe that the rapture happens at the very end of the 70th week of Daniel and then that there's a fourth group, sort of a new group that believes that the rapture of the church will happen sometime in the second half of the 70th week of Daniel. Now, these four views are popularly called pre-tribulation, mid-tribulation, post-tribulation and then the fourth view is known by the term the pre-wrath rapture. And the reason why they call this is because Jesus, in speaking about the 70th week of Daniel, called it a time of great tribulation.

And so, therefore, the 70th week of Daniel is often referred to just in common Christian vocabulary as the great tribulation. Now, you should know that the real tribulation part of the great tribulation will actually happen at the end part of that 70th week of that seven year period. It's the last half of the 70th week that is often known as this time of great calamity on the earth.

Nevertheless, just in common Christian speaking, many people refer to this entire 70 year period or excuse me, seven year period as the great tribulation. And so here's the question. When does the rapture happen? Does it happen at the beginning of the seven year period and then it happens pre-tribulation? Does it happen in the middle of the seven year period? And that would be called the mid tribulation perspective.

Or does it happen at the end of the seven year period? And that's called the post tribulation perspective. Well, I'm going to be talking to you about this on the remainder of our time this evening and then also next week. But let me spell it out to you tonight.

I'm going to speak to you about why I believe in the pre-tribulation rapture, because without hesitation, that's what I believe. Next week, I'm going to talk to you about the other perspectives of the rapture and why I believe them to be incorrect. And I'll also share with you why they believe that the pre-tribulation rapture teaching is incorrect.

And I think that's going to be an exciting study for us next week. But tonight, we also have something very exciting in front of us. Understanding scripturally why I or you, I believe as well, should believe in the pre-tribulation rapture.

Now, let me start off by saying that I don't think that this is a matter of Christian fellowship. I don't think somebody should be excommunicated. I don't think someone should be considered not a Christian if they don't believe in the pre-tribulation rapture.

This is an in-house debate. This is a matter that Christians of good conscience and good integrity and good intellect can disagree on. Nevertheless, let me say this.

I believe very strongly in the teaching of the pre-tribulation rapture and I believe it not because I've heard other people teach it and I just happen to agree with them. I believe it because I've exhaustively searched the scriptures and I believe that this is what the Bible teaches. And I believe that those who teach something different are incorrect.

I don't believe they're evil. I don't believe they're stupid. I don't believe they're dishonest.

But I do believe that they're incorrect. And might I say that since this is what I believe, what the Bible teaches, I don't want somebody else at our church to teach something differently. Now, please understand, if you come to Calvary Chapel of Simi Valley and if you believe in the post-tribulation rapture or the mid-tribulation rapture or the pre-wrath rapture, you're welcome to come here.

I have no desire to push you outside of our church or to make you feel unwelcome. I just don't want you to teach your perspective to other people in the church because that can be divisive. Then we have the matter of the pastor teaching one thing, people in the church teaching something else entirely, and not something that's just another slant but something that directly contradicts this.

And then we have a whole mess with that. So please understand, I'm not here to dictate to your conscience to tell you what you should believe or what you shouldn't believe. But I do think that, as Paul says, let all things be done decently and in order, that there be no divisions among us.

I would ask that if you disagree with me on this, well, God bless you. But nonetheless, I ask that you keep your opinions to yourself and not try to persuade other people in our church family to your opinion. And I'm glad that you're here if you disagree with me.

Because I think if you stick with me tonight and especially if you stick with me next week, I think I might just be able to change your mind. I think I might be able to show you from the scriptures very clearly why we could and should believe in the pre-tribulation rapture. And tonight I'm going to give you several reasons why I believe that.

So matter of fact, I'm going to give you four reasons why I believe in the pre-tribulation rapture. Here's the first reason I believe in the pre-tribulation rapture because the scriptures do not contradict themselves. Let me say that again.

I believe in the pre-tribulation rapture because I believe very strongly that the scriptures do not contradict themselves. And I believe when you take a look at all the passages that have to do with the second coming of Jesus, you have to understand that there must be two distinct phases of Jesus's second coming, one to receive his people and one coming to consummate the judgment of those who reject and rebel against him. And I think when you look at the scriptures, you have to say that these phases of Jesus's coming must be separated by some appreciable period of time.

If they're not, then I believe you have to honestly say that the scriptures contradict themselves. Let me give you some examples of this. You take a look in the Bible and you will find that some of the references to Jesus's return will describe world conditions that you might call business as usual.

Matthew chapter 24, beginning at verse 37, says this. But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the son of man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and given in marriage until the day that Noah entered the ark and did not know until the flood came and took them all away.

So also will the coming of the son of man be. Two men will be in the field. One will be taken in the other left.

Two women will be grinding at the mill. One will be taken in the other left. Watch, therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.

Did you notice world conditions at the coming of Jesus that are described for us there in Matthew chapter 24, beginning at verse 37, eating and drinking and giving in marriage as it was in the days of Noah friends before the rain started coming down at the deluge that encompassed the earth in the days of Noah until the time that the rains came out. It was business as usual. People were being married.

People were being given in marriage. People were eating and drinking and life was going on. It was just life as usual until the rain started coming down.

And Jesus says this is exactly how it's going to be at his coming. They didn't know that the flood was coming. It came completely unexpectedly, with no dramatic change in world conditions beforehand.

But listen, what Jesus says about is coming in another place in Matthew chapter 24. He says, for then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world at those time. No, nor shall ever be in Revelation chapter six.

It describes some of this calamity right before the return of Jesus. It says, and then the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains and said to the mountains and the rocks fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb. Friends, when the rocks are falling and kings are hiding in caves, I'm not talking about Bin Laden hiding in a cave.

I'm talking about the kings of the earth and everybody terrified. Friends, that's not a business as usual world. So here's my question for you.

Which will it be? Will Jesus return to this earth when the world is running business as usual, when men are eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage? Will he return to that kind of earth or will he return to an earth that is seeing incredible calamity, what you might call hell on earth? Well, for me, two distinct phases of Jesus is coming separated by some period of time explains this seemingly contradictory description of conditions. Is Jesus going to come to a world that's business as usual or is he going to come to a world that's filled with calamity? The answer is yes. He's going to do both.

He's going to come for his church to a world that's running business as usual. And then seven years later, when he returns in glory, he will come to a world that has seen unspeakable calamity. The Bible also describes for us different approaches to Jesus is coming to the earth.

In other words, some places were told that he comes to meet his people in the air. We just read about that in First Thessalonians chapter four, where it says that the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, with the trumpet of God and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.

It couldn't be more clear. In this coming of the Lord, believers are taken up from the earth and they meet Jesus in the air. But then again, we read in Revelation chapter 19 that John saw heaven opened and behold, a white horse and he who sat on him was called faithful and true and in righteousness.

He judges and makes war and the armies in heaven clothed in fine linen, white and clean followed him on white horses. Now, out of his mouth goes a sharp sword that with it he should strike the nations. Then he treads the winepress of the fierceness and the wrath of almighty God.

You see, this is a coming in triumph to the earth. Quite a difference there. One of them, Jesus stays in the air and receives the saints that come to him.

The other one, Jesus comes to the earth, which is it? Did the scriptures contradict themselves? I think not. I think one coming of Jesus, he will come in the air to meet his church and he will never set foot on planet earth at the rapture. But then some seven years later, at the end of Daniel's 70th week, Jesus will come with power and glory to the earth as the conquering Lord that he is.

Then again, not only are different approaches of Jesus to the earth described, but we also have description of different positions of the people of God. In other words, do we meet the Lord in the air or do we come with him as an army avenging God's righteous judgment? Again, that first Thessalonians passage, it says, Then we who are in a lot who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Isn't that clear? We are caught up from heaven.

We meet Jesus in the air. Excuse me, we're caught up from the earth. I misspoke there.

We're caught up from the earth and we meet Jesus in the air. But in Revelation chapter 19, it says that the armies in heaven clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed him on white horses when Jesus returned in triumph. So which is it? Is it that the people of God go up to meet Jesus in the air or is it that they come with him in power, in great triumph and glory? Well, the answer is that, yes, both of them are true.

You see, there are, though you should know, there are some who speculated that the rapture will really be the start of a big U-turn in the sky that we're going to go up and meet Jesus in the air, but then immediately turn around and accompany him on his return. I don't agree with that at all. From other passage scripture, I think we can safely say that these two distinct phases of the return of Christ must be separated by some appreciable time.

So we have different world conditions, different approaches of Jesus, different positions of the people of God. We also have different scenarios regarding the predictability of the date of Jesus's return. Here's my question for you.

Will Jesus return at a time that is unknowable to any human or will Jesus return at an exactly knowable date based on the midpoint of the last seven year period? So in Matthew, chapter 24, verse 36, Jesus says, But of that day and hour, no one knows. No, not even the angels of heaven, but my father only. See, friends, isn't that clear? Jesus is telling us that nobody knows when he's going to return.

Nobody. Nobody knows the day. Nobody knows the hour.

Now, by the way, you should know that some people have used this verse as a complete discouragement of the study of biblical prophecy. They say, listen, we shouldn't be looking into the things of prophecy of the things of the return of Jesus. After all, no man knows the day of the hour.

Well, that's true. But friends, Jesus said that we should be aware of the times and the seasons that we live in. And I can say with absolute certainty that no one does know the day or the hour that is just plain unknowable.

Friends, we can also say with great certainty that we can know the times and the seasons. And as we look around, we can have great reason to believe that Jesus is coming soon. But that's a subject for another Wednesday night.

Let's continue on with the thinking that we know that very clearly, Jesus said in Matthew, chapter 24, verse 36, that no one knows the day of the hour. But I want you to consider this passage from Daniel, chapter 12, verse 11. Listen carefully.

It says, and from the time that the daily sacrifice is taken away and the abomination of desolation is set up, there shall be one thousand two hundred and ninety days. That figures out to be three and a half years. And do you understand what the Bible is telling you right there? It says that from the time that the abomination of desolation set up, by the way, we're told in the scriptures that that marks the midpoint of Daniel's 70th week.

In other words, we have this final seven year period. And right in the middle of that final 77 year period will be this ultimate desecration of the Lord's temple in Jerusalem will be the setting up of an idolatrous image of the Antichrist himself in the Holy of Holies. That will mark the abomination of desolation and the exact midpoint of Daniel's 70th week.

And Daniel says, when that happens, you can start marking your calendar. Because one thousand two hundred and ninety days later, Jesus Christ is going to return in glory. You understand that, friends? Do you grab hold of that and really think through this? This means that for those who are on the earth during the Great Tribulation and when they see the abomination of desolation set up, they can literally start marking days off their calendar and they can know exactly when Jesus Christ will return to the earth.

By the way, I think that this will be common knowledge on the earth in those days. I think that that's one of the reasons why the armies of the earth gather together in the area of Israel at what's commonly called the Battle of Armageddon at the very end of Daniel's 70th week. They do it in a foolish, misguided attempt to keep Jesus Christ off of the earth.

Well, friends, as as you might guess, that's that's going nowhere. They're not going to keep Jesus Christ off the earth. But what I want you to see is some passages scripture tell us that no one will know when Jesus will return.

Other passages scripture tell us that you can start marking off the days and from a certain event. So which is it? Well, because I believe that the scriptures do not contradict themselves, I think we must say that there are two distinct phases of Jesus is coming, each separated by some period of time. So, again, I don't believe that the scriptures contradict themselves and we have different world conditions for the return of Christ described.

We have different approaches of Jesus to the earth described. We have different positions of the people of God described. We have different scenarios regarding the predictability of the date of Jesus's return described for us.

You get the picture here. These two different scenarios can only fit together if there are two distinct phases to the return of Jesus Christ, each separated by an appreciable period of time. So that's the first reason why I believe in the pre-tribulation rapture, because I believe that the scriptures do not contradict themselves.

Secondly, I believe in the pre-tribulation rapture because I believe I understand what the purpose of the great tribulation is. When Jesus spoke of the great tribulation, he described it in terms like this. Listen to Luke chapter 21, verse 22.

In that passage, he was speaking prophetically both of the soon judgment of Jerusalem and of the ultimate tribulation. Jesus used this foreboding description of what it will be like. Listen carefully.

He said, for these are the days of vengeance that all things which are written may be fulfilled. Remember the kind of time that we're talking about, you remember the passage I read you from Matthew chapter 24, verse 21, where Jesus said, for then there will be great tribulation such as not been since the beginning of the world until this time. No, nor ever shall be.

You understand that, my friends, I want you to think about it, that there have been periods of time in human history when there has been great and horrific suffering on this earth. Have many of you seen the movie Schindler's List? What a amazing description. What an amazing film about the agony and the horror of the Holocaust.

Friends, Jesus said that the great tribulation will be worse. Or if you go further back in history in Europe, perhaps during the days of the Black Death, there was a period of several years where up to one quarter of the population of Europe died. Millions and millions of people dead because of the plague.

As bad as that was, Jesus said the great tribulation would be worse. Do you get the feeling here? Do you get the understanding that this will be an absolutely horrific time? Because we're not just talking about a time when armies do their things or the police do their things or or man does horrible things, man, we're talking about divine judgment being poured out upon these earth. And the book of Revelation describes it with incredible vividness as it describes the seven seals and the seven bowls and the seven trumpets.

Describes great torment from demonic creatures set loose on the earth. It describes judgments that are universal by their very character, such as one third of all vegetation being destroyed, one third of all the creatures in the sea destroyed. It describes a massive pollution of the oceans.

It describes a third of all fresh waters on the earth being polluted. It describes one third of the day and night being plunged into absolute darkness. My friends, why? Why would God pour out such calamity upon the earth? Because as Luke 21, 22 says, these are the days of vengeance.

This is the time of God taking vengeance upon a Christ rejecting world. Now, if the purpose of the great tribulation is to pour out God's wrath on this earth before Jesus comes to reign and triumph. Then why does God need his people on this earth during that time? Why would God make his people targets of that wrath? Now, some people will object.

They will say, now, wait a minute here, pastor. We know that the Bible teaches us that there will be Christians on the earth during the great tribulation. And that is true.

You see, I believe that since the rapture takes place before the great tribulation, that at that time all believers will be taken up into heaven. But after they're gone, many people. Not numbered in the thousands, but numbered probably in the millions all over the earth will come to faith in Jesus Christ because they'll remember what their Christian friends have said, because they'll have it recalled to mind, because they'll read the scriptures, because there will be amazing witness and testimony by the hundred and forty four thousand by the two witnesses, by all these people mentioned in the book of Revelation.

There will be hundreds of thousands, if not millions brought to faith in Christ during the great tribulation. You say, well, how come they face it? Well, because they didn't come to faith before. And the rapture is God's way of getting as many as possible off of the earth before he pours out the wrath that will come.

Some people have thought that perhaps during the great tribulation, Christians will be miraculously protected from all of the calamity, just as Israel was protected from the plagues that came upon Egypt. But, you know, the multitude that saved from the great tribulation is saved in the midst of great sorrow and martyrdom. Revelation chapter seven describes that for us.

Seemingly, they're not protected from the calamity that's come upon the earth, although some believers seem to be such as one hundred and forty four thousand. My friends, it's important to notice. That if there are people or not, that if there are, there will be people of God on the earth during this time.

Those are those who have trusted Christ after Jesus came to the earth to receive his people. And that doesn't argue against God's heart to deliver all who do believe on him up to the point of Jesus is coming to receive his people from this outpouring of wrath. Friends, when we understand what the purpose of the great tribulation is, it makes us understand that Jesus will come for his people in the rapture of the church before the great tribulation.

So the first reason why I believe in the great, excuse me, why I believe in the pre-tribulation rapture is because I believe the scriptures don't contradict themselves. The second reason is because of the purpose of the great tribulation. The third reason is because believing in the pre-tribulation rapture is the only way that we can say Jesus can come today.

Be ready. Do you understand that the emphasis of all biblical teaching regarding the final things of history is clear? Be ready because Jesus is coming soon at a time when you don't expect him. Matthew chapter 24, verse 44 says, Therefore, you also be ready for the son of man is coming at an hour when you do not expect him.

Matthew chapter 25, verse 13 says, Watch, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the son of man is coming. Mark chapter 13, verse 35 says, Watch, therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, at the morning, lest he find you. Suddenly he find you sleeping.

And what I say to you, I say to all, watch. Friends, do you understand that Jesus condemned the mentality that says my master is delaying his coming? It's dangerous to have the mentality that says that Jesus cannot come today. And friends, if you believe that the rapture of the church comes at the end of Daniel's 70th week, if you believe that it comes in the middle of Daniel's 70th week, if you believe that it happened sometime in the second half, then you absolutely positively must say that the rapture can't happen today.

It can't happen tomorrow. It can't happen for the earliest for three and a half years, because we know plainly from Daniel chapter nine that the 70th week of Daniel, this final seven year period of history on this earth as we know it. We know that this final period of history cannot begin until this prominent world leader, popularly called the Antichrist, until the Antichrist comes and signs a covenant with Israel.

That's what begins the clock, the starting point, so to speak, for this final seven year period. Friends, you understand that the only way we can say the only way we can live with the watchfulness and the readiness that Jesus told us to have is if the rapture of the church will happen before the 70th week of

Daniel begins. If you're a mid tribulationist, then you can guarantee that the return of Christ to receive his people is at least three and a half years away.

If you believe in the pre wrath rapture, then you have to say that it's somewhere more than three and a half years. If you're a post tribulationist, then you must say that Jesus is coming for his people is at least seven years away. Friends, the Bible's message to us again and again and again about the coming of Jesus is watch, be ready.

He's coming at an hour that you don't know he's coming imminently. And if the rapture can happen at any time, then Christians should be ready and watching for the coming of Jesus Christ. Friends, to me, it just feels a lot better to watch for the coming of Jesus rather than to have my eye on the Antichrist.

Really, that would be the next development. If you believe in a mid tribulation rapture, a post tribulation rapture or a pre wrath rapture, your main interest is, well, when is the Antichrist going to come up? No, I'm not saying that people who believe that standpoint, that they are more interested in the Antichrist than they are in Jesus Christ. That's not what I mean by that at all.

I'm just saying that the next thing on the prophetic calendar for those folks is the emergence of the Antichrist. I like to put the coming of Jesus as the next thing on my prophetic calendar. Finally, let me give a fourth reason.

The first reason was because I believe that the scriptures do not contradict themselves. The second reason was because the purpose of the great tribulation is the outpouring of God's wrath upon a Christ rejecting world. And so it makes sense that God would take his people out before that.

Thirdly, I believe in the pre tribulation rapture because it's the only way that we can say that Jesus can come today and that we should be ready. Then finally, I would say that it just makes sense that God would take away this unique institution called the church before he focuses in on Israel for the 70th week of Daniel. That is a seven year period.

Remember Romans chapter 11, verse 25. It says that God will turn his redemptive focus to Israel once again when the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. Will come into what? They come into the church and it makes sense for God to take the church then at the time that he turns his redemptive focus back upon Israel.

Not that the church ceases to exist. Not that Gentiles can't be saved. Not that Jews find salvation apart from their Messiah.

No, not at all. It's just that in God's unfolding plan, he turns the focus of his attention back upon Israel and the church is taken up off of the earth to be with the Lord forever. This may correlate very well with the conclusion of the times of the Gentiles spoken of by Jesus in Luke chapter 21, verse 24.

Well, friends, those are my four reasons. And I have to say that I personally find them very compelling reasons. You may not.

You may be of a different opinion altogether. But I want you to understand. I want you to grab a hold of this truth that I think very plainly the Bible teaches the pre-tribulation rapture.

I want us to turn to one other passage of scripture here this evening to take a look at in the balance of our time together. I want you to turn to second Thessalonians chapter two, because I think we can understand something marvelous. What I regard second Thessalonians chapter two as is it's a passage of scripture that makes no sense unless we believe in the pre-tribulation rapture.

Now, I'll show it to you. Second Thessalonians chapter two, beginning out verse one, he says, Now, brethren, concerning the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ or of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to him, we ask you not to soon be shaken in mind or troubled. Either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us as though the day of Christ had come.

Now, let's understand that this is the second letter that Paul wrote to the Thessalonians. And the idea is that after his first letter, there had come in some folks who were teaching some different things. Paul is now addressing some of these questions that were brought up by his first letter.

Remember, in the first letter, we took a look at that at the beginning of our time together this evening. Paul instructed the Thessalonians about the catching away of the church to be with Jesus. Now, what makes this passage a little hard to figure out is Paul is answering their questions, but we don't have their questions right in front of us.

We kind of have to piece together what the question, what the problem was. And Paul mentions the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to him. I think that there's a subtle reference there to a difference in the two events.

Paul is hinting at essentially two comings of Jesus. One coming is the gathering together with him. That's the coming for his church.

And the other coming is with his church to judge a rebellious world. Matter of fact, one good biblical commentator, Edmund Hebert shows that the grammar of the ancient Greek and second Thessalonians chapter two, verse one shows that it really is spoken of two distinct but yet related events. And Paul warns them in these first two verses of second Thessalonians chapter two, he says that they should not be soon shaken in mind or troubled.

You see, apparently there was a misunderstanding of Paul's teaching or an incorrect application of it that had caused the Thessalonians to be shaken in mind and troubled. And here Paul uses very strong wording. But the idea is that they were afraid.

Why? Because they were afraid. Notice it here in verse two, as though the day of Christ had come. Their fears centered on the idea that the day of Christ had already come.

Now, you should know something here from sort of a biblical textual study that there are different ancient manuscripts that contain slightly different phrasings of things. Through an exhaustive research and correlation and study of the manuscripts, sometimes there's a bit of a debate as to the exact wording. I believe that the preferred manuscript reading of second Thessalonians chapter two, verse two says the day of the Lord instead of the day of Christ.

You see, the day of the Lord is a concept with a rich Old Testament background. It's not a single day, but it's a period associated with God's outpouring of judgment and the deliverance of God's people. The day of the Lord is the great tribulation that's described for us in Matthew chapter 24.

And some translations, such as the King James Version, translate the end of verse two by saying, as though the day of Christ is at hand. The idea when you hear that is to say, oh, the day of Christ and that it's not really here, but that it's at hand, it's at close. That's not the idea here in the translation.

The idea is that the day of the Lord had come. Let me put it to you this way. The Thessalonians were not afraid that the day of the Lord was coming.

They were afraid that they were in it. Now, it was obvious to them that the day of Christ or the day of the Lord had not yet been completed. I mean, everybody knows what happens at the completion of the day of the Lord, which again, let me remind you, is not a single day, but a period of God's triumph.

Sort of in this thinking from the prophets of the Old Testament, you have the day of man on one side and then you have the day of the Lord on the other side. The day of man is when man does his thing and when man, you know, shows his wisdom and strength and his folly, really. But the day of the Lord is when the Lord flexes his muscles, so to speak, and that's going to be done with the most evidence, with the most degree of power and strength in this period that we know of the Great Tribulation.

Again, it's obvious that the day of the Lord had not yet been completed because it finishes with the triumphant, glorious return of Jesus. And every eye will see that everybody will know when that's happened. But you see what the Thessalonians were afraid of was that the day of the Lord had begun and Paul is going to demonstrate to them that the day of the Lord had not yet begun, that it hadn't yet dawned because the Thessalonians were afraid that they were in the Great Tribulation, that they were in the day of the Lord.

Why would that make them afraid? Please think about this for a moment. The Thessalonians would only be shaken. They would only be troubled by the thought that they were in the day of the Lord, that they were in the Great Tribulation, that would only trouble them if Paul had taught them a pre-tribulation rapture.

Ladies and gentlemen, if Paul had taught them a post-tribulation rapture, a mid-tribulation rapture, or a pre-wrath rapture, then the Thessalonians would be stoked by the idea that they were in the day of the Lord, that they were in the Great Tribulation. They would say, we're in the Great Tribulation. That means Jesus is coming very soon.

But if Paul taught them, which I absolutely believe that he did, Paul taught them the pre-tribulation rapture, then the idea that they were in the Great Tribulation was very disturbing to them for the simple reason that they thought they had missed the rapture. So, please, it's important to notice that the Thessalonians would only be shaken or troubled by the thought of being in the Great Tribulation if they had been taught by Paul that they would escape that period through the rapture. Otherwise, they would, in a sense, welcome the Great Tribulation as a necessary prelude to the second coming.

But Paul had clearly taught them that they would escape God's judgment on this earth during the period known as the day of the Lord or the day of Christ. He taught them that personally and through the letter of 1 Thessalonians chapter 4. Then Paul goes on to say in verse 3, let no one deceive you by any means, for that day will not come unless the falling away comes first and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition. Well, Paul wants to make it clear to them, you can know that you're not in the Great Tribulation because the man of sin, popularly known as the Antichrist, the man of sin has not been revealed.

That's what marks this final seven year period. That's what marks the Great Tribulation is the revelation of the man of sin, because he's the one that signs this spectacular contract or treaty or covenant with Israel. And Paul says, look, I know you're troubled by the idea that you're in the Great Tribulation, but you're not in the Great Tribulation because the man of sin has not been revealed.

And this great falling away has not come first, by the way, that great falling away. Many people believe that that is a reference to the rapture because you could translate that term falling away as departure. And Paul could be saying to them, you can know that you're not in the Great Tribulation because the rapture hasn't happened yet.

There's some debate about that. Many good scholars believe that it isn't describing the rapture, but it's actually describing an apostasy that will happen in the end times that other passages scriptures such as First Timothy, Chapter four, Second Timothy, Chapter three described for us very plainly. Whether it's describing the apostasy or the rapture, it can go either way.

But Paul's point is clear. You're worried that we're in the Great Tribulation and that you missed the rapture, but you can know that you're not in the Great Tribulation because you haven't yet seen the falling away that comes first. You haven't yet seen the man of sin revealed.

So, folks. Do you see plainly how Second Thessalonians Chapter two doesn't make any sense unless Paul taught the Thessalonian believers the pre-tribulation rapture? That's one reason among many biblically that I believe it. Friends, I recommend to you that you study these things for yourself.

And though I want you to trust what I teach you, be a Berean. There is a danger in having an inherited theology. And I want you to know that I don't believe in the pre-tribulation rapture just because great men that I know and love and respect teach it.

I believe it because I have diligently searched the scriptures and I believe that it is exactly what the scripture teaches, but it heartens me to know that other great men that I know who teach the Bible also believe the same thing. I think you should believe it. And I think that it gives us more of an urgency than ever to be ready for the return of Jesus Christ and to say, come quickly, Lord Jesus.

I want to be ready for your return. Well, next week, we're going to talk more about differing views of the rapture, and I'm going to explain to you why I think those are incorrect and why I believe some more why the teaching of the pre-tribulation rapture is exactly correct. Lord God, we thank you for our time together this evening and we ask that you give us a heart and a mind that is ever ready, ever mindful for the return of Jesus Christ.

We want to know and we want to believe, God, that you can come, Jesus, at any time for us. We want to trust in the imminent return of Jesus and use that as a spur for greater holiness, for greater passion in getting your word out and to love you all the more. Help us to do it, Lord, in Jesus' name, amen.

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