

The Rapture and the Appearing, or Sovereignty and Responsibility

by H.J. Vine

The Rapture and the Appearing are two principal stages of Christ's coming, with the Rapture being an act of pure sovereign grace and the Appearing being connected to our responsibility as the Lord's servants.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:52, Colossians 3:4, 1 Thessalonians 1:9, 1 Thessalonians 4:14, 2 Thessalonians 1:10, 1 Peter 1:7

Topics: "Eschatology", "Sovereignty"

Description

H.J. Vine preaches on the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, focusing on the Rapture and the Appearing. The Rapture involves the translation to heaven of believers when Christ comes in the air, while the Appearing will be His glorious return to establish His kingdom on earth. Believers are called to be converted, serve the Lord, and eagerly wait for His coming. The special revelation in 1 Thessalonians 4 unveils the catching up of believers to meet the Lord in the air, a moment of pure grace and love from the Lord.

Transcript

1 Thessalonians 1:9-10, 4:14-end; 2 Thessalonians 1:10; Colossians 3:4.

Our subject is the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the two principal stages of His coming, which are termed the Rapture and the Appearing. By the Rapture we mean the translation to heaven of all who belong to Christ, and this we know as taught by Scripture will take place when He comes in the air, as we have read in 1 Thessalonians 4, to take all those who believe on Him to be with Him and like Him for ever. The Appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ will be when He appears to the world in the greatness of His glory to establish His kingdom on the earth. The Rapture will be an act of pure sovereign grace, but connected with the Appearing is our responsibility as the Lord's servants below. We shall have our place in the kingdom glory of our Lord Jesus Christ according to the way we have lived and walked in this world. So in connection with the kingdom and glory you have an expression that could not be used in connection with the Rapture: "That you may be counted worthy of the kingdom and glory." As to the Rapture we know that that is not a question at all of our worthiness, but it is all the result of the Lord's own grace and love for us, and His desire to have us with Him and like Him for His own pleasure.

Now in the first scripture (1 Thess. 1:9-10) we find there are three things that mark those that are to have part in the great glory that is involved in our Lord Jesus Christ's second coming. The first is they are converted. The second thing is that they serve the Lord, and the third that they wait for His coming. If you have never been converted, you must begin there. You must be converted to God. The gospel has been sent to you for this purpose, it opens people's eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God; and the moment they turn to Him they get the forgiveness of their sins--blessed be God--and an inheritance in the heavens through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Being converted, the next thing is we serve the living and true God. You may be religious and do so-called Christian work, but it is worse than useless if you are unconverted. We must turn to God first, and then we can serve the living and true God.

The next thing is we wait for His Son from heaven. I have no doubt that takes in the whole thing, not only the Rapture, but the whole thought of the Lord's coming, both to catch us up to be with Him and then to fill the earth with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. Christ is coming to set up His kingdom. He will bring to pass the time that Isaiah spoke of, when men will give up all their strifes, and beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks, and peace will flood the earth.

Now in 1 Thessalonians 4 we have a special revelation as to how the Lord will bring all that about. How is He going to bring out those who are to share in that glory? How is the royal family of heaven going to take up their place with Christ in glory for the ordering and government of the earth? Paul gets a special revelation as to that. If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, there is this we may be sure of, that those who sleep in Jesus, as well as those who are alive and remain, when Christ comes in His glory, He will bring with Him. That will come to pass in this way, the saints are caught up to meet the Lord in the air. Before we come with Him we shall be caught up to Him. That is the revelation that is specially made known in the fourth chapter, it is "the word of the Lord" concerning the catching up of those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

The revelation of the Rapture in Thessalonians 4 was not made known until the assembly was formed on the earth. There was no church--no assembly of Christ as we have it--in the Old Testament. The foundation of the church is built upon the apostles and prophets of the New Testament. The assembly had no previous existence.

Sovereignty

The Lord said in Matthew 16, "I am going to do something." And also in John 14, "I am going to do something." And again in 1 Thessalonians 4 he has told us of something that HE is going to do. He said, "I will build My assembly." He had asked the question, "Whom do ye say that I am?" Peter answered, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus said to him, "You are a blessed (happy) man, Peter. The Father has made that known to you." May this get into the souls of all here tonight. "Upon this Rock," Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus said, "I will build My church," "My assembly." He does not ask you to build it. He said, "I will do it." It is on Him of whom confession is made by Peter--on Himself as the Christ, the Son of the living God, revealed to us by the Father. He did not say, "I will build the assembly on the revelation of the assembly." Do not think men are going to get into the assembly even by studying assembly principles. Have you got Jesus, the Christ, the Son of the living God? Can you say, "He is precious to me"? It was the Father who made Him precious to you, and you to whom the Father has made Him precious are a stone for the building, just as Peter was. The Son of the living God is the foundation,

with all the force and energy of divine life in Himself. Now, then, we who have got Jesus, and own Him as the Christ, the Son of the living God, we are by His own work put into that assembly, His assembly, and the gates of hades cannot prevail against it. Their schemes and counsels and espionage are powerless.

Again, in effect, He said, "I go to the Father, and in His house there is plenty of room. I will prepare a place for you, that where I am you may be also." Doubtless His going there as Man prepared the place. Now, mark, "I will come again, and receive you unto Myself, that where I am there YE may be also." He does it all. Let our hearts rest in the perfection of the love, and in the perfection of the work of Christ; not only in His wonderful work on the cross, but in His present work in building the assembly, and in nourishing and cherishing it, and also in the fact that He will come again, and receive us to Himself. Why? Because He loves us. He loves us so much that He not only joyfully gave all that He had in order to buy the field for the treasure that was in it (Matt. 13:44), but such was His love that He must give Himself for us. Oh, how He must have loved us! And He says, "I am going to get the answer to all that I have gone through for you. I am going to answer my own heart's desires by presenting you to Myself without spot or wrinkle or any such thing." And He reminds us of these things. Why? That they might be a word of encouragement to us in these trying times. He nourishes our affections, and cherishes us by telling us of His love for the assembly, of which we are a part.

Then, as we said, we have that special revelation as to the manner of His coming for His own. He will come into the air. We shall meet Him in that particular point in the universe. He will leave that place where He now is, in the glory, and come to the border of this world's atmosphere. He will come with what is there termed in military language "a commanding shout"--a shout for the assembling of those that are His. Yes, He will come with a shout! The Apostle speaks of "the patience of Christ" in 2 Thessalonians 3. For a long time He has waited! Throughout all this period of grace His rights in this world have been refused Him. Think of His patience--nearly two thousand years! How great is His long-suffering! The Apostle desired that the Lord would direct our hearts into the patience of the Christ. Yet some of us wish the Lord would come tonight, so that we might get out of this poor world. How impatient we get; but look how patient He has been. When the moment of His patience is ended, that military shout will be heard. He will step from the throne. He will come into the air, and His shout will call His hosts together. The archangel will take up the command, and pass it along the ranks. The "archangel's voice" will be heard, and everything will be cleared out of the way that this mighty host--the dead in Christ and the living saints--may have a free passage right up through the air to meet their blessed Lord. Hallelujah! Then there is "the trump of God." That trump of God will sound, but I do not believe the unconverted will hear these things--the shout, the voice, the trump.

Notwithstanding all the questioning today as to the secret rapture, I fall back upon it with greater confidence than ever. The world "knew not," we are told, even when Noah went into the ark before the flood. And I can give you another reason for holding it to be the truth. There was a time when you sat in a gospel meeting, and the Word was preached in the power of the Spirit of God. The Lord spoke to you perhaps. No one else heard that voice. Or it may be you were alone when your soul was reached by that life-giving touch that brought you consciously to trust in Jesus. You heard the voice of the Son of God, as it says, "The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live." And you heard it for yourself, and no one else knew what had happened. So when Jesus comes His voice will be heard by those who have ears to hear, and by no one else. Thank God, in the twinkling of an eye we shall be caught up. The dead in Christ get the first touch. Then we which are alive and remain get the next touch, but altogether we are caught up to meet the Lord in the air. The change will take place in a moment, in the

twinkling of an eye (1 Cor. 15:52). The scientists used to say that before you can see the twinkle of an eye there must be at least a thousand twinkles! How, then, can the thing be done? The other day some soldiers were in charge of a gun in the north of France. Suddenly a great German shell burst right amongst them. It put the gun out of action, but when the explosion was over they looked round, and though every man standing there was unhurt, one man was missing. "Where is he?" one asked, but to this day they have not found even a button off his coat. In the twinkling of an eye he was gone. If man's ingenuity can produce a power that can destroy men in the twinkling of an eye, do you think the blessed Lord who made all things cannot take us away in the twinkling of an eye? Of course He can!

Responsibility

"If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him." We are first taken up to Him, and then we shall come out with Him. I am not going into the judgment side of His coming tonight. I know He will break up the present system of the nations, and establish a new system with Israel restored to the Lord as the centre. I want to speak of Him now as coming out in all His blessedness, when He comes down like showers on the new-mown grass, after the scythe of judgment has done its work. He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe. He will have you and me with Him. He is going to have all His own there, so that when He shines out in His glory He may be glorified in them. We are going, if you like, to help to put things right. You cannot do it now. Men are trying to break militarism, but the Bible tells us of a worse and a blasphemous militarism that will follow this one. The Roman Empire will be revived with an imperial military head, full of blasphemy (Rev. 13). Things cannot be put right till Jesus comes. But when He comes He will do it. I said the other day they would shut up the great gun works. "No," said a converted pitman, "they will not. They will turn the same works into a place for making implements to till the land. They will still make use of the works." "Oh," I replied, "all right. You mean they will be done with making instruments of destruction, and they will make implements of peace and prosperity, using the iron for the purpose for which God gave it."

Now before that time comes there is an important moment embraced in that short word "NOW." Sometimes you think, "If I could live over last week again I would do things very differently." You cannot alter the past. "Tomorrow," you say, "I intend to be really here for Christ." You are not sure you will have tomorrow. It is always the present that you have. You can turn a meeting like this to good account by using your ears in a right way, judging what is said, not waiting for everything to be elucidated so that you will have no need of exercise. You want something to exercise your moral discernment upon. If everything is watered down for you you will never develop your spiritual teeth. You want to be making good use of your time. Do not take everything for granted that a speaker says. Always be testing and trying things in the presence of God, that you might get what God has got for your soul, so that if the Lord leaves you here, you might come out in this life to serve the Lord faithfully.

When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, we shall appear with Him in glory. This is a blessed reality. Take it home to your heart, and be prepared to take up the present path. Be out and out for Christ. Be devoted to Him as were the three mighty men to David. One day he breathed out a desire to drink of the water of a well of Bethlehem. They caught the breathings of his heart, and they made their way through the host of the Philistines, and brought him to drink. Do not you know, notwithstanding all the power of the Philistines today, that you may bring something that is pleasurable to Jesus? If you are near enough to the Lord that you catch the desires of His heart, you may; and if it does cost you a little trouble and a little difficulty, still it gives pleasure to Him. Let us remember this, that when we get to glory, we shall not have the chance of doing what we can do now. The little moment of suffering service will be over, and then we shall reign with

Him. Christ shall come to be glorified in us, but we want Him to be glorified in us now. He is going to be by and by. He is going to be "wondered at," as the word "admired" is rightly translated, in all them that believe (2 Thess. 1:10). In that day when He shines out, and when His bride (the assembly) comes out as the city with twelve gates, she will light up the nations. It says, "The nations shall walk by its light." He will be wondered at, my brother, in you. Wondered at as you shine out with Him!--one of those gems lit up to reflect the glory of God to the nations. When the One who is our life is manifested, we shall be manifested with Him. You say, "Will all this terrible state of hostility cease then?" Thank God, it will. Christ will regulate the nations. All will be ordered in perfection, and then peace shall flow over the earth, and righteousness shall obtain from pole to pole, and joy shall fill every heart. I know that we have righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost even now, but it will be established publicly then. All shall know the Lord. No man will need to get hold of another then and say, "Come to a gospel meeting and get converted." All will know the Lord from the least to the greatest. Such will be the effect of the New Covenant established with Judah and Israel. Their sins and iniquities will be remembered no more, and the knowledge of the glory of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. He will appear, and you and I will appear with Him. The heavenly city shall shine down her beautiful rays of guidance for the earth. No, the Kaiser is not going to be the world emperor--Jesus is. You and I are going to share with Him, to take part with Him in His great and glorious administration. Brother, you are in for greater things than the Cabinet at Westminster! Wake up to it! Seek to walk worthy of it! You are converted with an end in view! We suffer with Christ now: we shall reign with Him then. We shall appear in glory with Christ. What a prospect!

I remember the first time I saw one of those electric signs. I came out into one of the streets one night, and I saw a letter light up on a building. I thought that was a strange thing, and while I was looking at it another letter lit up, until at last the shining sign all lit up was there before me, telling me the name of the firm that ran a huge business establishment in the city. God comes and He touches you, and He touches me, and lights us with the knowledge of Christ, and so His work goes on, but soon He will have the whole lit up with divine light. He will put us all up there with His beloved Son, and then we shall shine out as the divine sign in surpassing splendour, having the glory of God. What will be seen? Just one word expresses it--"CHRIST." When Christ who is our life shall appear, we shall appear with Him in glory, and right through the universe He will be glorified and wondered at in all of us who have believed.

May God give us to wake up a little more to these great and glorious things; and in the meantime, the little NOW, to be behaving in such a way that we may be counted worthy of the glory. I know the blessed Lord is wonderfully gracious, and He will have a place for every one of us in that glory, but I see some dear brethren going on faithfully following the Lord--perhaps not making any big show, but I believe they are piling it up up there, where Christ is. Some one says, "Might it not make us a little selfish if we went in for that?" No. I remember a brother saying to us, "Go in for as many crowns as you can get"; and then he added this, "That you may cast them all at the feet of Jesus." The more you can get the more you will have for His praise and glory. The result, we are told, will "be found to praise and glory and honour in the revelation of Jesus Christ: whom having not seen, ye love: on whom (though) not now looking but believing ye exult with joy unspeakable and filled with the glory" (1 Peter 1:7-8, N.Tr.).

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