

The Late John Kavanaugh was a Jesuit Philosopher and an Ethics professor at the University of St. Louis. Before he died, he told a story that has been reprinted in many publications. He told how he went to work for three months at "the house of the dying" in Calcutta. He was seeking a clear answer as to how best to spend the rest of his life. On the first morning there he met Mother Teresa. She asked, "*And what can I do for you?*"

Kavanaugh asked her to pray for him. "*What do you want me to pray for?*" she asked.

He voiced the request that he had borne thousands of miles from the United States: "*Pray that I have clarity.*"

She said firmly, "*No, I will not do that.*"

When he asked her why, she said, "*Clarity is the last thing you are clinging to and must let go of.*"

When Kavanaugh commented that she always seemed to have the clarity he longed for, she laughed and said, "*I have never had clarity; what I have always had is trust. So I will pray that you trust God.*"

I resonate with Mother Teresa's advice. I hope that by now... you have come to realize that my goal... in preaching this series on Bible prophecy is not clarity – for clarity's sake. I am not wanting to merely fill your head with a better understanding. ... I am praying that God speaks through our study together and makes you more willing to trust Him.

There may be some here... who have been sensing for a long time... a certain direction for your life... that you believe God wants you to take. Perhaps what you *thought*... is your greatest need is - clarity. But maybe... a study like this... highlighting God's eternal plan for the ages... will elicit a greater trust to involve yourself with God's eternal plan.

Do I want to be as clear as I can by teaching what Scripture declares? Of course I do. But my aim is that a greater trust takes place inside of you.

The subject of our study this morning presents a great challenge for anyone who desires to be clear. ... And once people believe they **HAVE** the clear meaning... they want to defend it and argue it... because it seems so clear to them. (And what ends up getting lost...? The end result of - increased trust. Clarity become the priority.) ... There is perhaps no other matter... where evangelical Christians disagree more... in their perceived clarity of this topic. ... We are going to talk about the rapture.

I want to be honest... and represent the positions for the timing of the rapture... that I do not go along with... in a fair manner. But in discussing them... I do want to explain the position for the rapture's timing that I take... and why I subscribe to it. Now... I have been saying for weeks... that I believe the rapture is the very next event to happen... that is presented to us in Bible prophecy. It can happen at any moment. Not every evangelical Christian believes this... but I do... and I would like to show you why.

The last time we were in Revelation... a few weeks ago... we had just finished chapter three. We have taken time to examine other passages of prophecy... elsewhere in the Bible... and showing why these prophesied events must happen BEFORE the event known as the Tribulation.

Revelation chapters 2 and 3 gave us the complete picture of the church age... from start to finish. (Seven is the prophetic symbol of completion... and we are given seven distinct periods of church history.) ... Then... chapter four begins with the words - “after this...” ... And I think that means after the church age here on earth... because that is what he just finished describing... with enough prophetic detail... that we can track the different distinct church eras. ... Then chapter four takes us to the scene in Heaven... immediately before the Great Tribulation... We will see that Revelation will do that several times. We will go back and forth... from Heaven... to Earth... to Heaven... to Earth... numerous times.

But through the entire discussion of the Great tribulation from Heaven’s viewpoint... and Earth’s vantage point... NEVER again... is the church mentioned in Revelation’s description of the Tribulation. (The church was the complete focus of chapters 2 and 3... then it is conspicuously absent... until AFTER the tribulation... when Christ finally returns to Earth to rule.

After the church’s existence on earth (Revelation chapter three)... chapter four gives us a picture of what is happening before the throne of God. So this morning... I would like to discuss the controversial topic of the rapture... and why I believe it is also one of the events... like the others we have been looking at in recent weeks... which takes place between Revelation chapter 3 and chapter 4... (In other words... before the tribulation.)

There are three important passages that describe the rapture for us. We will start our discussion with these. The first is John 14:1-3.

### **John 14:1-3 (ESV)**

*“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”*

In this passage we find Christ’s promise to come and take us to the very place where He is about to go – Heaven. Jesus was about to leave this earth... go to Heaven... prepare places for us... and then come get us... and take us to this new place.

It is important to see that we are taken somewhere different than this earth... because one of the views that differs from mine on the timing of the rapture... says that Christ will come... rapture us off the earth to Himself... and then take us right back to Earth... where we will reign with Him. This view is called “Post-tribulation” (because it says the rapture will occur “post” or after the tribulation.) It has us go meet Jesus in the air... and then come right back down with Him. ... But this view renders John 14:1-3 as having some other meaning... than what it plainly says. (John 14:1-3 says He will rapture us and take us to Heaven.)

The second important passage about the rapture is perhaps the most primary passage... to the position I believe about the timing. It is found in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

### **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (ESV)**

*<sup>13</sup> But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. <sup>14</sup> For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. <sup>15</sup> For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we*

*who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. <sup>16</sup> For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. <sup>18</sup> Therefore encourage one another with these words.*

It is clear in reading chapter four... that Paul is in the midst of answering a series of questions that the Thessalonian believers had written and asked Paul. They had questions about staying sexually pure... and they had a question about the proper way to love someone who is a free-loader and would not work... and then in verses 13-15 a third question is addressed.

*“What happens to our loved ones who have died? If Christ raptures those who are alive when He comes – what happens to the believer who lays decomposing in a grave?”*

They knew about the rapture. They had obviously been taught about it. But they were confused. In verse 18... Paul says “encourage one another with these words.” Apparently they were quite distraught over this issue... and needed to be encouraged. The thought of their loved ones (who had died) missing out was too much for them to bear.

So Paul comforts these bereaved believers with the truth that they will not miss out. In fact... they will be the first to enjoy the benefits of the rapture.

Three times Paul used a euphemism for death. He calls it sleep... “those who have fallen asleep.” The Bible will only use this euphemism for believers... it is never used for the death of an unbeliever. You see... for the believer... death is only a temporary suspension of physical activity –

until the rapture. Every night when my head hits the pillow... I experience something similar. There is a temporary suspension of physical activity until I awake. When a believer dies... the same thing is true. (Unless you or your spouse do a lot of tossing and turning... and kicking... and arm flailing... this is a pretty good analogy.)

Having established for us that believers who have died will experience the rapture first... Paul goes on to reveal the chronological sequence of events for the rapture... in seven stages.

1<sup>st</sup> – Jesus descends from Heaven

2<sup>nd</sup> – A shout is given. The Greek word for “shout” here... describes a command from a military leader. Jesus will probably give this shout.

3<sup>rd</sup> – It is accompanied by the voice of *the* archangel. (It will be Michael.) Angels are often used in putting God’s plan into motion. He will probably be repeating the command from Jesus – the military leader of this campaign.

4<sup>th</sup> – There will be the sound of a trumpet. In the Bible... trumpets were used to call the people to worship... or to call them for war.

5<sup>th</sup> – The dead in Christ will rise first. “In Christ” means that only Christians who died previously will rise. These are church saints. Old Testament saints are not part of this. Other prophecy shows that they will be resurrected later.

6<sup>th</sup> – Believers who are alive at the time will be brought up into the clouds and meet with Christ and the dead in Christ. Living believers will be raptured alongside of the previously dead ones.

7<sup>th</sup> – We will forever be with Christ. Verse 17 provides us with a guarantee that once we have been united with Christ in the air... we will permanently remain with Him. We will return with Christ to the place that He has prepared for us in Heaven... which Jesus spoke of in John 14:1-3.

Now we are ready for our third important passage. Here we will learn about the change in the nature of our bodies. Before we are taken to the place that Jesus has prepared for us... there is a needed change that must be done to our physical bodies.

**Romans 5:12-14 (ESV)**

*<sup>12</sup> Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— <sup>13</sup> for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. <sup>14</sup> Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.*

Mankind is living under the sentence of death. Our Physical bodies are subject to corruption and MORTALITY. (I don't know about you... but every day... more and more this truth becomes more evident to me... as my corrupted body falls apart.) That is because the sin nature is in it. This body that we all have is subject to sin... mortality... death... and corruption. A change is necessary before we can enter the place where Christ will take us. A change is needed for us to live in God's presence... and in a different atmosphere. So here now is the **third** important passage about the rapture...

**1 Corinthians 15:50-58 (ESV)**

*<sup>50</sup> I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. <sup>51</sup> Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,*

*<sup>52</sup> in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. <sup>53</sup> For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. <sup>54</sup> When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” <sup>55</sup> “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” <sup>56</sup> The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. <sup>57</sup> But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>58</sup> Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*

The emphasis of this passage is on the rapidity of the change. It will be done “*in a moment.. in the twinkling of an eye.*” I don’t know how quick the process of our going up in the air and being collected with Jesus will take... but our bodies will change “*in a moment... in the twinkling of an eye...*”

Verse 52 says that this will happen “at the last trumpet.” Many Christians see this as a strong indication that the rapture will occur in the middle of the Tribulation. In the middle of the tribulation a seventh and final trumpet will sound – and then the worst part of the tribulation will occur... the last 3 ½ years. The last trumpet in Revelation is very prominent. Great drama surrounds it. And it happens in the middle of the tribulation.

Paul used a definite article – **THE** last trumpet. It is not just any trumpet call... it is a specific one... and Paul’s use of the word “the” means that he knew the Corinthians would know the exact trumpet he meant. ... This is part of the argument that those who believe in Mid-Tribulation will cite.

But stop and think for a moment. How would the Corinthians know about the seven trumpets in Revelation. The book had not been written yet! The

only reference they would have come to mind are the references found in the Old Testament – and the most obvious would be the Feast of the Trumpets. During this ceremony there was a series of trumpet blasts... and then the “Tekiah Gadola” – one long trumpet blast. It marks the event and calls to worship. ... Instead of the last trumpet in the middle of the tribulation... I think that this is the trumpet we just saw in 1 Thessalonians 4:16... the trumpet that signals the rapture... just before the dead in Christ are assembled in His presence... and in the air.

Now that we have looked at these three passages that describe the rapture... I would like to say a little more about why I believe this event will occur between what is described in Revelation 3... where we left off... and chapter 4... where we will resume. Does the rapture happen before the Tribulation? I believe so...

Once we continue our study in Revelation... while the Tribulation is going full-force... we will see that there will be believers who are still on Earth... and who will suffer these un-imaginable events. Many theologians point to this and say we PRE-tribbers have lots a splain’n to do. How can the church be raptured off the earth... and yet we will find... as we read on in Revelation that there are saints going through the tribulation...?

### **Revelation 6:9-11 (ESV)**

*<sup>9</sup> When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. <sup>10</sup> They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” <sup>11</sup> Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.*

I don't have any problem with this... nor do I find it hard to "splain."

Once the Rapture occurs... I am sure there will be many who will suddenly put two and two together... people who you and I have witnessed to... people who would go to church and learn about Christ and His eternal plan of the ages... but who never placed a saving faith in Jesus. Once they see it happen just as the Bible declares... "*Oh shoot! They were right!*" will be the response of many. Today... it is commonly known even among non-believers that there will be an Anti-Christ who will demand to be worshipped – but those who demonstrate a saving faith will not take the mark of the beast and will suffer greatly...

But not only will many of our friends and family members suddenly realize what they need to do... but we will also see in Revelation that there is going to be a few Jewish revivals (during the tribulation.) We saw in Ezekiel 22, 24, and 37 that the tribulation is in large part about God bringing His people (the Jews) back to a belief in Him. Many will. God places two powerful evangelists in Jerusalem (Revelation 11 describes) and Revelation 7 lists 12,000 believing saints from each tribe of Israelites... 144,000 total.

So... I got no problem "splain'n" how there will be saints on the earth... after the church is taken in the rapture... before the tribulation.

But here are some passages of Scripture that have convinced me that the rapture can happen at any moment... and that it will happen before the Tribulation. The first is found in Luke 21:34-37...

**Luke 21:34-37 (ESV)**

<sup>34</sup> *"But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come*

*upon you suddenly like a trap. <sup>35</sup> For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. <sup>36</sup> But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.” <sup>37</sup> And every day he was teaching in the temple, but at night he went out and lodged on the mount called Olivet.*

In Verse 35... Jesus says that the Tribulation will come upon EVERYONE who is dwelling on the face of the earth. His wording allows for no exceptions. There will be no escaping it by anyone who is alive on planet earth. ... But then... in the very next verse... (verse 36) Jesus gives indication that there **is** a way to escape it... but not by remaining on earth. Those who stand before the Son of Man will escape it... and this standing before the Son must be somewhere other than on earth. That is what happens at the rapture. We are taken off the earth and stand before Christ... while EVERYONE dwelling on earth suffers through it.

Here is another passage. Let's go back to Thessalonians... 1  
Thessalonians 1:9-10...

### **1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 (ESV)**

*<sup>9</sup> For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, <sup>10</sup> and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.*

Jesus saves... delivers... spares us from... the wrath to come. Keep in mind that Paul used the definite article again – “**THE**” ... THE wrath to come. Paul refers to a specific future wrath which the Thessalonians had some knowledge about.

Mid-Trib believers... and Post-Trib believers will say... “Now hold on! The wrath does not necessarily refer to the tribulation. The same word for wrath in the Greek is also used by Paul in Romans chapter 1. Because mankind refuses to follow all the evidence of creation... but instead chooses to exchange the truth of God for a lie... God is building up a horrific wrath. Mid-Trib believers and Post-trib believers say that the wrath mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 1:10 is the general wrath of God... and not the Tribulation.

But the general wrath of God in Romans already exists. It is present today and it is building. The wrath in 1 Thessalonians 1:10 is a *future* wrath. It doesn't exist yet. It is THE wrath *to come*... not the wrath that already exists.

Jesus saves... delivers... spares us from... the wrath to come... The Tribulation!

Next... stay right here in 1 Thessalonians... 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10...

### **1 Thessalonians 5:1-10 (ESV)**

*<sup>1</sup> Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. <sup>2</sup> For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.*

Before we continue... let's establish what the subject is of this passage. What is Paul addressing...? The Day of the Lord...

What's that...? The phrase “Day of the Lord” always refers to the tribulation. It is important that we recognize that 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10 is a discussion about the Tribulation – especially when we come to verse 9...

*<sup>3</sup> While people are saying, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. <sup>4</sup> But you are not in*

*darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. <sup>5</sup> For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. <sup>6</sup> So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. <sup>7</sup> For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. <sup>8</sup> But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. <sup>9</sup> For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>10</sup> who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.*

Verse nine says God has not destined us for wrath... but has destined us to obtain salvation... Now... notice that this deliverance is treated as a future thing. God has destined us to obtain a salvation (or a deliverance.) It is not something already obtained. ... Have believers already obtained their salvation in terms of being able to spend an eternity with Christ...? Yes! ... we have our salvation. ... This is a future saving (or deliverance) from the wrath that is being discussed by this passage. (And what wrath is that...? The Day of the Lord... otherwise known as the Tribulation.

And now... lastly... lets look at Revelation 3:10. We saw this one when we studied the letter to the Church at Philadelphia. (That is the church age just before the era of the church that we are currently living in – Laodicea.) Revelation 3:10 indicates that there will be some believers still alive from the previous church era... when the Rapture occurs... and they will be kept from the Tribulation.

**Revelation 3:10 (ESV)**

Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth.

These are my reasons for believing that the rapture can happen at any moment. These are not the last days... these are the last seconds! It is the next prophesied event... and many of the events that we have looked at... which must take place before the Tribulation... The Jews coming from all parts of the earth back to their homeland... coming out of a wrathful situation (which the Holocaust was)... and coming back primarily as unbelievers... THAT HAS HAPPENED. The countdown that Jesus spoke of in Matthew 24... a distinctive multi-nation war... coupled with distinctive famines and earthquakes... is part of our recent history.

Now... we can all simply feel blessed because we have greater clarity about God's timing and events. Or we can delve deeper into a trust relationship with Christ – and participate more fully with Him.

It is said that Satan once called to him the emissaries of hell and said he wanted to send one of them to earth to aid women and men in the ruination of their souls. He asked which one would want to go. One creature came forward and said, "I will go." Satan said, "If I send you, what will you tell the children of men?" He said, "I will tell the children of men that there is no heaven." Satan said, "They will not believe you, for there is a bit of heaven in every human heart. In the end everyone knows that right and good must have the victory. You may not go."

Then another came forward, darker and fouler than the first. Satan said, "If I send you, what will you tell the children of men?" He said, "I will tell them there is no hell." Satan looked at him and said, "Oh, no; they will not believe you, for in every human heart there's a thing called conscience, an

inner voice which testifies to the truth that not only will good be triumphant, but that evil will be defeated. You may not go."

Then one last creature came forward, this one from the darkest place of all. Satan said to him, "And if I send you, what will you say to women and men to aid them in the destruction of their souls?" He said, "I will tell them there is no hurry." Satan said, "Go!"