

Rapture Time

Last week we talked about the reality of the rapture. We see it repeated through Scripture and it is a key core concept of God's plan. It is our blessed hope. So the obvious question....How long do we have to wait? When will the rapture happen? Specifically will we be going through the tribulation? None of it? Some of it? All of it?

People have been debating the timing of the rapture almost since the moment Jesus ascended from the Mount of Olives.

Acts 1:6–11 (ESV) — 10 And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, 11 and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

Look at how Luke describes their response.

Luke 24:50–53 (ESV) — 50 And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. 51 While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. 52 And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, 53 and were continually in the temple blessing God.

They didn't know when. They were just full of Joy that Jesus would be coming back. Not just joy, but Great Joy.

But they were curious...The disciples asked Jesus when that day would be and what would be the signs. Then when Jesus started talking about great tribulation....and when Jesus revealed to John the Revelation....the question of His return began to center around the timing of that return and this 7 year time of tribulation to come. DIAGRAM 1

So today we join that discussion. Exploring the question, will the church go through any or all of the seven year Tribulation before the rapture occurs. This is not some ivory tower debate. There is a great deal at stake.

If the rapture occurs in our lifetime, and I believe it very well could, will we be here to see the Antichrist? Will we be forced to decide whether to take his mark? Will you witness the carnage of God's wrath poured out on the whole world? Or will you be in heaven during that time, experiencing a glorious fellowship and intimacy with Jesus and His sheep? Will you and I be here for none, half, or all the Tribulation? It is an important and sobering question.

There are three main views of the timing of the rapture. Pre Trib, Mid Trib and End Trib.

When it comes to the main views of the rapture, they all agree that believers are exempt from the wrath of God. This is based on

1 Thessalonians 5:9–11 (ESV) — 9 For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. 11 Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

DIAGRAM 2

Pretribbers believe that God's wrath begins at the beginning of the Tribulation and that God will keep believers from it by removing them from the entire Tribulation.

Midtribbers contend that the second half of the Tribulation is the time of God's wrath and that believers are raptured prior to the last 3.5 years of tribulation- a time Jesus calls the "great tribulation,"

Pre Wrathers- Believe that the rapture will occur right before the Bowl Judgments.

Posttribbers confine the wrath of God to the end of Tribulation and hold that it will be poured out on unbelievers only, with God protecting believers from it while leaving them on earth until the Second Coming.

So I want to spend the next two weeks explaining why I believe the PreTribulation Rapture is the best option based, not on my opinion or my desire, but based on the Scriptures.

I will outline six of them today and the last one will be topic of our third Sermon on the Rapture next week. With that ahead of us, let me share with you the first reason to support the Pre Tribulation Rapture.

Every view of the Rapture has strengths and weaknesses. Whatever view one holds, one must acknowledge its drawbacks. In my opinion, the Scriptural evidence for Pre-Trib has the best support and the fewest drawbacks.

So I want to cover some of the reasons why I believe that Jesus will return for His church prior to the tribulation.

1. Disappearance of the Church in Revelation

The Greek word for the church is ekklesia. It occurs 20 times during the book of Revelation. Revelation 1-3 mentions the church 19 times. In fact Jesus we will see addresses the churches specifically in Revelation 1-3.

But starting in Chapter 4 the word ekklesia disappears. There is an abrupt silence about the church for the next 15 chapters. More interesting is that these chapters, Chapters 4-18 are the most detailed description of the Tribulation.

The apostle John is lifted up to heaven and transported into the future where he sees visions of end of days. For 15 chapters John watches and describes all that is going on on the the earth during that time. Odd right? John who is the loving disciple makes no mention of those he loves. Not one mention of the church.

So you would expect that the role of the church during that time would be critical to understanding. You would expect that Jesus would talk about how His bride, the church is protected from tribulation or what their actions are during the tribulation....and yet....just silence.

Do you know when the church is mentioned again? Chapter 19.

Jesus' bride is always the church. Note that when the church is finally mentioned again, she is described as a bride returning to earth with her glorious bridegroom. She, the church, cannot return to earth unless she has left. In fact, this verse tells us that she has been there some time because she has prepared herself.

Revelation 19:7-8 (ESV) — 7 Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; 8 it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure" — for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

Revelation 19 The Marriage of the Lamb HAS COME. Past Tense. After that John next sees the Rider of the White Horse, Jesus preparing to return. The Marriage of the Lamb happens in Heaven during the tribulation. How can He marry a bride that is not there?

The first event the raptured Church will participate in is a judgment by God — the Judgment of the Just. This judgment on works is not to determine eternal destiny, but to determine degrees of reward

The second event is the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. This feast celebrates the spiritual marriage of Christ's Bride — the Church — to her Savior.

The third event follows the Marriage Supper of the Lamb and is the Church's preparation to follow the King of Kings into the Battle of Armageddon at the conclusion of the Tribulation. This event is the Second Coming of Jesus Christ

How has she prepared herself? She has been clothed in the righteous deeds of the Saints.....Notice that those clothes were granted to her....the word means awarded.....suggesting that she has already faced judgment and her deeds now determined as righteous. Thus she is prepared to marry the Holy Groom. She is worthy of wearing the righteous deeds of the Saints.

This implies that the church has not only been in heaven with Jesus, but has been there long enough to have their deeds evaluated and to receive a covering of white linen- their righteousness.

So beginning in Revelation Chapter 4 as the seals are broken and the trumpets and bowls are poured out for God's wrath, there is no mention of the followers of Jesus. And when the tribulation is over and Jesus returns He brings with Him His bride.

I believe that the church is not mentioned during the Tribulation because we are raptured prior to it.

Now to be fair, while there is no mention of the global church in Revelation 4-18, there is mention of "Saints". It is very clear that there will be believers on earth during the tribulation but they accept Christ during the tribulation and are not church-age saints. Remember we have Tribulation Saints and Tribulation Martyrs.

So if the church is not present on earth during the tribulation, then is there any mention of them being in heaven during that time? I am glad that you asked....

In Revelation as the judgments of God are poured out...there is repetitive mention of 24 Elders who are enthroned in Heaven.

I believe that the 24 Elders mentioned twelve times in Rev 4-19 represent the church in heaven during the tribulation. These 24 elders are pictured by John, in heaven, judged, rewarded and enthroned. They are clothed in white, have received crowns and are worshipping the Lamb.

Revelation 4:4-5 (ESV) — 4 Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads.

Revelation 4:10-11 (ESV) — 10 the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, 11 "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."

Who are these 24 elders and where did they come from? There are four main views: 1) Are they are angels? 2) Do they represent in some way Israel? 3) Are they the leaders of the raptured church? or 4) do they represent all believers of all time?

Let me share why I believe they are there representing the raptured church.

1) They are called Elders. In Scripture elders represent leaders of God's people. In the New Testament, the Elders are the representatives of the church. In Revelation, we find a description of elders, who are enthroned, crowned and dressed in white. In addition, to the title elder, I believe there are several reasons why these elders are the representatives of the raptured church.

2) The Number. The Levitical priesthood in the Old Testament numbered in the thousands. Since not all could worship in the Temple at the same time, the priesthood was divided into 24 groups that served in the temple on a rotating basis. The active 24 represented the entire body. They were on earth, before the throne of God in the temple representing the people and worshiping God. But there is also something unique about these men...none of the 24 on earth were ever enthroned in the temple. In fact, they never really sat down. Yet...these 24....

3) Their Position. They are seated on thrones. Christ promised that the church would be enthroned in heaven.

Revelation 3:19–22 (ESV) — 20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. 21 The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.

4) The Crowns.

Crowns are promised to New Testament Believers. We will receive them at the judgment seat which occurs for us at the rapture. Scripture mentions the 5 crowns for NT believers: The imperishable crown, crown of righteousness, crown of glory, crown of life and the crown of rejoicing.

The Bible is specific that the rapture will be for those who are "In Christ" They are those who during the church age following Jesus' resurrection believed in Him. They, we, are His bride. Those who have died, fallen asleep in Christ, will rise first and those who are alive on earth will go second. They will meet Jesus in the clouds and He will take them to His Father's house where He has been preparing rooms.

And from a pretibulation perspective, Old Testament saints will not be resurrected and rewarded until the second coming of Christ at the end of tribulation. So these are not Old Testament Saints and not Israel.

Once we arrive we will go through God's judgment seat and receive our crowns. We will have our glorified bodies, will be clothed in white to represent our righteousness through Christ, and will receive crowns for the deeds we have done on earth.

These 24 elders have received their crowns.

Thus they are not angels...they are not Old Testament Saints....and they don't represent the Jewish Nation of Israel

5) Their Clothing: The white clothing of the Elders is identical to the clothing of church-age believers.

They have received their clothing of righteousness because they have been given crowns at the judgment seat of God.

6) The Distinction- These elders are clearly distinguished from angels in Rev 5:11

Revelation 5:11–12 (ESV) — 11 Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, 12 saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"

So to sum up the first reason why I believe the church is raptured prior to the tribulation is the Place of the church in Revelation. They are not mentioned in Rev 4-18 as being on earth, but I believe they are mentioned during that time of being in Heaven...judged, glorified, crowned and enthroned. When the church is mentioned again....we are prepared as His bride and returning to earth with Him.

2. Rapture vs. Return

That leads us to the second reason....The New Testament describes two facets of the Second Coming of Christ.

1) He will come FOR his church to escort her to His Father's house.

John 14:3–4 (ESV) — 3 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. 4 And you know the way to where I am going."

1 Thessalonians 4:15–18 (ESV) — 15 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. 16 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. 17 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. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.

2) He will come WITH His saints when He descends from heaven to judge His enemies and establish His kingdom on earth.

Zechariah 14:3–4 (ESV) — 3 Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle. 4 On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley, so that one half of the Mount shall move northward, and the other half southward.

1 Thessalonians 3:12–13 (ESV) — 12 and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, 13 so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

I along with many believe that these are two separate events separated by time. Both describe the Lords' coming but do so in two stages. And between these two stages is the time of tribulation.

The First stage is the rapture when Jesus comes FOR His church...it could happen at any time and is a imminent and signless.

1 Thessalonians 1:9–10 (ESV) — 9 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, 10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

We are to wait for Jesus to come deliver us from the wrath to come. The essence of the Rapture.

This is a critical point to the understanding of Revelation. So let me spend a few moments making sure that we know the difference between the Rapture and the Return.

Rapture Christ comes in the air...Return Christ comes to earth.

Rapture Christ comes FOR His saints....Return Christ comes WITH His saints.

Rapture Believers depart the earth....Return unbelievers are taken away.

Rapture Christ claims His bride....Return Christ comes with His Bride

Rapture Christ gathers His Own....Return angels gather the elect.

Rapture Christ comes to save and reward...Return Christ comes to judge and punish.

Rapture not mentioned in the Old Testament it is a new revelation. Remember Paul says he has a mystery to unveil....Return predicted numerous times throughout the Old Testament.

Rapture a time of blessing and comfort....Return a time of destruction and judgment.

Rapture involves church age believers only....Return involves Israel and Gentile Nations.

Rapture will occur in a moment in the blink of an eye and only His own will see Him.....Return will be visible to the entire world.

Rapture Christ comes as the bright morning star....Return Christ comes as the Sun of Righteousness.

Throughout this series we have talked about the signs of the End Times. The signs of the Second Coming of Jesus.

Scriptures tell us of the preceding events of the Second Coming in great detail. Jesus will return 3 1/2 years after the abomination of Desolation in the Temple. Almost every event on our timeline is preceded by very specific signs.....except the rapture. The rapture is signless. It happens unexpectedly and at any moment.

Another reason the Rapture and the Second Coming of Christ are two different events, is because the event cannot be both signless and with signs. Second coming of Christ is preceded by lots of signs.....Rapture none at all.

So clearly the Rapture and the Return are two different events. Yet only a pretribulation rapture maintains the imminent return of Jesus any moment FOR His saints. the protection of His Saints from wrath, and the final glorious return WITH the saints.

So 1) Placement of the Church in Revelation and 2) Rapture and Return.

3. Exemption from Divine Wrath

To answer this we must consider the purpose of the Tribulation. The reason God takes mankind through the tribulation is two fold: To show Israel that Jesus is the true Messiah in order for them and others to repent and be saved AND to pour out His wrath on sin and destroy Satan.

The focus of the Church Age is over at the Tribulation. Everything turns back to Saving the Jewish people. We will see 144,000 Jewish Witnesses who will proclaim truth lead by 2 Witnesses with supernatural powers. Their primary target is the Jewish people.

Jeremiah 30:6–7 (ESV) — Why has every face turned pale? 7 Alas! That day is so great there is none like it; it is a time of distress for Jacob; yet he shall be saved out of it.

Also, Revelation 12 describes picturesquely a woman who gives birth and has to flee due to persecution during the Tribulation. The context shows the woman is Israel. And again, the Battle of Armageddon is the world against Israel. Two-thirds of the Jewish people will be killed from these battles. These texts and others show that the Tribulation is meant for the redemption of the Jewish people.

Why are the Jews the object of persecution during the Tribulation? For one, Satan hates the Jewish people for giving the world the Scriptures and the Messiah, as well as he wishes to thwart God's promises to the Jews

Secondly, the Jews have to be so desperately brought low that they finally call out to their Messiah "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" The Tribulation, then, is used for Israel's redemption which also results in the punishment of the wicked.

The Church does not fit into this scenario, and are left out of the purposes of the Tribulation. They would need to be removed — caught up — before the Tribulation begins.

People often consider Pre-Trib supporters as escapists who are afraid of the Tribulation. They say we want a view that just removes us from the world's troubles. They argue that it is arrogant to think that of all the generations of believers who have ever lived, that we are somehow so special that we will be exempt from the Tribulation if the rapture occurs in our lifetime. It is after all the best option for us. But we cannot hold that opinion unless Scripture supports it above all others.

First of all no one who lives on this sinful planet escapes tribulation and trials. Jesus promises us that we would have them. "In the World you will have tribulation" We all face tribulations because we live in a fallen, sin-cursed world.

But there is a difference between tribulation and THE Tribulation. We all face general tribulations but The Tribulation is very specific.

General tribulations that we all experience today are the result of Satan's wrath and persecution. The Tribulation to come will be dominated by God's wrath and judgment.

The Tribulation is God's wrath upon the unbelieving world, and not for those who are saved from Christ's resurrection to the Rapture — called the Church. Yes believers have suffered all throughout human history, but there is a special time (just like the Flood) set apart called the Day of the Lord for God's wrath. Christians suffering and the Tribulation/Day of the Lord are different.

True believers in Christ during the Church Age, represented by the Church of Philadelphia, are promised in Revelation 3:10, "Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth."

Paul states in 1 Thessalonians 1:10, "and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath."

1 Thessalonians 5:9, "For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Romans 5:9 states, "Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!"

Ephesians 5:6 states, "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient."

It doesn't make sense, though, for God's people to endure God's wrath. Part of what salvation in Christ means is that God saves us from the wrath we deserve (Ephesians 2: 3-5; 1 Thessalonians 5: 9). This has been God's pattern— not to judge the righteous with the wicked. Lot and his family were rescued from Sodom when God poured out His wrath on the cities of the plain (Genesis 18– 19). Also, Enoch's rapture to heaven before the Flood illustrates this biblical principle as well (Genesis 5: 23-24). God saves His people from His wrath upon sin.

But why? What is it about the Tribulation that necessitates our absence from this time? The Tribulation is the product of God's wrath upon wickedness. The book of Revelation clearly refers to God's wrath at least seven times. The wrath of God commences with the first seal and continues all the way until the Second Coming.

What purpose is served by Jesus having His Bride suffer through the worst time in human history? I can't imagine any man leaving his bride in the midst of death, destruction, disease and terror. Even if he knew she was somehow protected. Particularly since the tribulation is the outpouring of God's wrath on sin and Jesus died to keep us from the punishment of sin.

Both Pre Tribulation and Mid Tribulation supporters agree that the church, the Bride of Christ, will be protected from the time of God's wrath. Post Tribulation supporters believe that God's people will be protected from His wrath but will have to live through it.

Now once you decide when you think Tribulation begins, it is easier to answer the question of when you think the Rapture will occur.

Pretribulation....Rapture occurs before any of these.

Midtribulation....Rapture happens after the 7th trumpet judgment at the mid point (3.5) years because this is when the Great Tribulation starts

Post Tribulation- Rapture happens after all the judgments.

Remember that all agree that God will keep His church from the wrath. They will either be protected or they will be absent.

Mid Tribulation supporters believe that the real wrath is the great wrath of the bowl judgments and thus the rapture occurs after the 7th trumpet sounds.

Let me show you why I believe this Mid Tribulation view is not the best.

Revelation 3:10–11 (NASB95) — 10 'Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. 11 'I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown.

First, note that Jesus says this time of testing is for the whole world. He is talking about the one time in history where this occurs...the Tribulation.

Note what Jesus says....I will keep you from...Not I will get you through.

Note that Jesus promises not to keep us from the trial but to keep us from the TIME of the trial. We are protected from the period of time of the trials not just the trials themselves. This verse strongly indicates removal before the Tribulation and not protection through it.

Finally, Jesus tells us that He is coming quickly

Putting these four points together, I clearly see that the Lord will deliver His people from the time of worldwide testing by His sudden coming for them at the Rapture.

4) Removal of the Restrainer

Paul talks about the Man of Lawlessness....the Antichrist. Some at Thessalonica thought that the Day of the Lord had come...The Second Coming of Jesus.

2 Thessalonians 2:1–8 (ESV) — 1 Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, 2 not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.

The Day of the Lord...the day of the return of Jesus. Then Paul tells them how they will know....

3 Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, 4 who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.

The Return of Christ will not come until the Rebellion comes first, the Antichrist is revealed, The Antichrist sets himself up as God in the temple of God. That occurs according to Scripture at the midpoint of the tribulation. The Return of Jesus to earth will come only after these signs...

So what is keeping this rebellion this lawlessness from being revealed? What is delaying it?

5 Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? 6 And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. 7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming.

The Restrainer is God Himself in the Presence of the Holy Spirit on earth.

Well, what is keeping the Antichrist from putting in his appearance on the world stage? You are! You and every other member of the body of Christ on earth. The presence of the church of Jesus Christ is the restraining force that refuses to allow the man of lawlessness to be revealed. True, it is the Holy Spirit who is the real restrainer. The Holy Spirit indwells the believer. The believer's

body is the temple of the Spirit of God. Put all believers together then, with the Holy Spirit indwelling each of us, and you have a formidable restraining force.

Only the Spirit of God is powerful enough to hold back and restrain the forces of Evil.

Note that it is He who restrains it....The Person of the Holy Spirit.

The Rapture will change everything. When the Rapture occurs, the Spirit-indwelt church and its restraining influence will be removed. That will release the world to sin as it never has before. Christians who stand for civic righteousness and law and order will no longer be present exerting their influence. The church's salt and light will be extracted from the earth. For a time at least, only unsaved people will hold government office.

Satan will be able to put his plan into full swing by bringing his man onto center stage to take control of the world. Evil will erupt and expand unchecked beyond anything known in the history of man. It will be like the removal of a huge dam. The world will be inundated with evil of unimaginable scope and severity.

However, the Holy Spirit's return to heaven will not be a complete withdrawal from earth, but a reverse Pentecost of sorts. His activity will be like it was in the Old Testament.

The Holy Spirit will not be absent during the tribulation. But those who have been spiritually reborn, the restraining force, will have been raptured.

The convicting, drawing, regenerating ministry of the Holy Spirit is essential for anyone to be saved both now and in the Tribulation

Jesus said that He would build His church and the gates of Hell would not prevail against it. I don't believe Satan can have the influence he needs to have during the tribulation if the church is still present on earth. The gates of Hell cannot prevail against us.

There will be no doubt during the tribulation that the gates of Hell are being opened in full force.

6. Imminency

Numerous passages in the NT speak of the unexpected and immediate surprising return of Jesus for His church.

1 Corinthians 1: 7 (NASB)—“Awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ” 1 Corinthians 16: 22 (NASB)—“Maranatha” (This word means “our Lord, come.”) Philippians 3: 20 (NASB)—“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” Philippians 4: 5 (NASB)—“The Lord is near.” 1 Thessalonians 1: 10 (NASB)—“to wait for His Son from heaven” (The word for wait in Greek is in the present tense, which means they were to wait continuously and literally means to “wait up for” like a parent waiting up for and looking for a child that he or she expects to be home at any moment.) Titus 2: 13 (NASB)—“looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus” (Why be constantly looking for Christ if He can't come at any moment?) Hebrews 9: 28 (NASB)—“So Christ . . . will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.” (Why eagerly await His coming if it's a long way off?) James 5: 7-9 (NASB)—“Be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. . . . For the coming of the Lord is near. . . . Behold, the Judge is standing right at the door.” 1 Peter 1: 13 (NASB)—“Fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Jude 1: 21 (NASB)—“waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life” Revelation 3: 11; 22: 7, 12, 20 (NASB)—“I am coming quickly.” Revelation 22: 17, 20 (NASB)—“The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come.’ And

let the one who hears say, 'Come.' . . . He who testifies to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming quickly.'
Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."

Any moment. Imminency means that the Rapture could occur at any moment. Other prophetic events may take place before the Rapture, but no prophetic event must precede it.

Without warning. Since the Rapture could occur at any moment, then one must be ready for it at any time. If signs were required to precede it, then it couldn't occur at any moment. Thus, imminency means that the Rapture is a signless event.

Certain, but not necessarily soon. Third, imminency means that the Rapture is certain to happen but not necessarily soon. Imminent does not mean soon; rather, it means inevitable. Imminency, therefore, combines two key elements: certainty and uncertainty. An imminent event is one that is certain to occur, but the timing of it is uncertain.

Because only the pre-Trib position allows for an imminent, any-moment, signless coming of Christ for His own. Only those who believe in a pre-Trib Rapture can honestly say, "Jesus may come today." The other views cannot say this. They expect certain events to precede the Rapture, and those events haven't happened yet. The imminency of the Rapture should fill us with hope, anticipation, and motivation to godly living. Believers should live with this hope every day— Jesus may come today! Only imminency allows for this blessed hope (Titus 2: 13). And only pretribulationism accounts for imminency.

If He is midtrib then His return cannot occur until the middle of the tribulation and would be preceded by numerous signs. The same issue happens post tribulation.

Imminency is the most obvious reason that the PreTrib Rapture makes the most sense theologically. Any other view of the rapture loses urgency. The one thing that Jesus made crystal clear is that His return could come at any time and His followers need to be ready. Take away this truth and most of the Scriptures don't make sense.

This view gives me a strong sense of urgency regarding my own walk with Jesus, my motivation to witness for Him, to not put down deep roots here knowing it is not my home, to not worry about my earthly tent, to have peace about today and tomorrow and to keep my priorities straight. It also engages me in making sure that I am engaged and focused on God's mission not mine.

One of the things that I struggle with the most, is wasted potential. Particularly when it comes to believers and God's Kingdom. For believers to be given gifts, talents and opportunity to impact the world for Christ....and to not engage in the mission literally hurts my heart. They lose their sense of His imminent return and chase after other little gods with their time, talents and treasures.

It is so frustrating because we need everyone at their battle stations as Satan begins grooming the world for the AntiChrist.

For these and several other reasons, I support the view that the rapture could occur at any moment and that Jesus will take His bride home before the tribulation starts.

Any other view of the rapture places signs ahead of it and gives me a sense of passiveness, complacency, and lethargy. If I am mid trib I can wait for the antichrist to declare himself to be God in the temple...if I am post trib then I can wait of the final bowl judgment.

Such views don't align with the attitude and expectation of the early church in Acts or the churches that Paul instructed repetitively to live and expect His return at any time. I don't know if Pre-Trib rapture is the right answer, but to me it best aligns with Scripture. For that reason I

embrace it but it also helps me to live the way I need to live.....expectant...with a sense of urgency...eager to go home....and anticipating His return at any minute....fully present and engaged in my part of His mission.

7. Blessed Hope

After Paul describes the rapture to the Thessalonians he says....

1 Thessalonians 4:18 (ESV) — 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Titus 2:12–13 (ESV) — 12 Training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, 13 waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,

To add to that, if Paul had believed in anything other than a pre-Trib Rapture, what encouragement could he have given them? Would the truth of the Rapture really be that comforting? If God's people would have to endure 3 ½ years or all 7 years of the Tribulation before He comes, how much of a comfort would the Rapture be?

Could you honestly get excited about the Rapture if you knew that you had to endure a time on earth when all the nineteen judgments of Revelation 6– 16 were being poured out? But in reality, Paul uses the Rapture to encourage the Thessalonians to have hope.

1 Thessalonians 4:15–18 (ESV) — 15 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. 16 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. 17 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. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Jesus could return at any moment. He could rescue us from this sinful world....He could in an instance literally change us forever. Today...this day....could be the day....it may be tomorrow....we may never meet together again as a church. All of our plans for this week and for our future on earth could change in an instant.

Think about it this way. It is possible that by tonight, we will never have to experience a world crippled by sin....a world in rebellion against Jesus....never experience sickness again....never experience fear of the future again...Never experience our flesh nature again.

We will in an instance be forever changed. That is why Paul said to encourage one another with these words and why it is called our Blessed Hope.

Next week

Next week we will finish our focus on the rapture by looking at the last reason...and most compelling reason....that I believe the rapture must be pre tribulation.....we have a wedding to attend....

The bride of Christ....Church age believers....must be present for the Wedding and the Wedding Feast with Christ. In addition, they must return with Christ. It turns out that when we understand Jewish Weddings, we will understand why Pre trib rapture is the most compelling explanation.

I want close with this thought today, I want to remind all of us that we will all meet Jesus in our lifetime plus one second. The rapture may not come before you go. Either way, you will be face to face with Jesus. When you die or when you are raptured, the result is the same. So if you are 15 you will be face to face with Jesus in the next 85 years. If you are 60, face to face with Jesus in the next 40 years...If you are 80 face to face with Jesus in the next 20 years.

11 Days ago Charlie Kirk most likely thought He would meet Jesus in the next 70 years and it turned out to be 70 seconds. We don't know what the future holds so we better know the One who holds the future.

Jesus could return for us at any moment....perhaps this week during the Feast of Trumpets....Perhaps on your drive home...perhaps a day far off in the future....But it is later than it has ever been. That brings great hope or great despair depending upon where you stand with Jesus as Your Savior. Let's Pray.