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Revelation 4

Revelation 4:1, After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, “Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.”

2 Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne. 3 And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald.

So tonight I want to take some time and I want to talk about this transition period from earth to heaven.

Now, in verse one of chapter one, we’re told that this prophecy is a direct revelation from the Lord Jesus Christ. It was given by the Father to Jesus; Who in turn revealed it to His angel, who He sent to the earth; to reveal to His servant the Apostle John. John at the time had been exiled to the Island of Patmos for preaching the gospel.

And then in **Revelation 1:19**, we’re given the outline for the entire Book of Revelation. The Apostle John was told to; **“Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.**

The things which John saw in chapter one, we've already talked about. He was given a vision of the glorified Jesus walking among the churches among other things.

And then the things which are speak speak of the church age from the time it was born at Pentecost until the time of the Rapture which is yet to take place. And of course, we're still living during that time, no doubt in the last days of that time.

And the seven letters which we have been studying for the last several weeks are addressed to seven actual churches which were located in Asia Minor at the time in which John lived.

But we also learned that those churches represent all the churches down through the church age. And the message that Jesus gives to the seven churches, each have application to each other, as well as to us as individuals.

In other words, when Jesus says, let him who has ears hear what the Spirit says, He's talking to all believers no matter the church age they were part of; or are part of; because again, we're still living in the

And so the church today is part of that conversation.

And so as Christians, when we read what Jesus, through His angel, dictated to John, we need to listen very carefully to the things He said, because this is also the One who John sees sitting here on this throne in heaven. And we're told over and over in the scriptures that we're to examine ourselves, and we're to evaluate our lives, and our motives, and our actions, or non actions in light of what God's word says.

And when we do, if we find that we have fallen short of our calling or if we are shown sin in our lives, then we need to confess that sin and immediately change directions.

And so the church was still present on the earth in chapters two and three. But here in chapter 4, there's been a transition and the church, who by the way John represents, is now in heaven.

And what I want to talk about this evening is how and when they got there. And of course this is a picture if you will, of what most theologians refer to as the Rapture of the church.

Now, there are at least three different views as to **when** the Rapture will actually take place in the timeline of eschatology. And the term "eschatology" is just a fancy word, which means the study of "last things" or the study of the end times.

And the three views are these; First, and the majority of evangelical Christians, me included, hold to this view; and our church doctrine also holds to this view. And we believe that the Rapture of the church will take place just prior to the beginning of the seven year tribulation period, which will begin of course, approximately seven years prior to Jesus Second Coming. And this is the pre-tribulation view.

The second view is the mid-tribulational view which states that the rapture will occur at or near the mid-point of the tribulation. And in this view, the church will be removed just prior to things getting really bad here on the earth.

And if we could choose this would be my second choice, with pre-trip being my first.

Now, the third view is post-tribulation, which states that the rapture will occur at the end of the tribulation. And that one makes no sense at all really. I mean why would you take the church up; just to bring us right back down?

And then there's a fourth view, not very common view, known as pre-wrath, which is a slight modification of the mid-tribulation position.

Now, there are a number of scriptures in the Bible that refer to the Rapture, but probably none as well known as the one in 1 Thessalonians 4. We use this scripture many times at funerals to bring comfort to the loved ones of those who have passed on. And we want to remind them that one day soon, we're going to see them again, if they were indeed Christians and we are indeed Christians.

And by the way, the Rapture and the Second Coming of Christ is not only what we die for, it's what we live for; or at least it should be! This what we call that blessed hope and I don't know how people deal with death without having this hope. There's great hope in knowing that the Lord Jesus is coming back one day, that is if we've truly been born again.

And so this is the message that Paul is giving to the Church at Thessalonica, and he says in.

1 Thessalonians 4:13, But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, (he's referring to Christians who had died physically) lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

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. 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. 17 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. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

And of course when this does occur, it will be a fulfillment of the promise that Jesus made to His disciples and to us for that matter in John chapter 14. He had just told them of His impending death, and that He was going to be leaving for a while. And when they became sad, He gave them these words to encourage them. He said;

John 14:1, “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

No doubt, even in their confusion these had to be great words of comfort. And in our times of sorrow and uncertainty these should be words of comfort for us as well.

And of course, the Apostle John was present in the upper room that evening, and he heard that promise from Jesus; and now he’s being given a vision of how it will all come to pass.

And this vision that he sees and is sharing with us is the next big event that will take place in the life of the church. And when it will happen exactly, nobody knows, only the Father and Jesus. And though Jesus told His disciples that only the Father knew the time; that was when He was here on the earth. That was before His resurrection.

But after His resurrection and ascension, I believe the Scriptures teach that He does know now the time. But of course we don’t know, even though folks like to guess and speculate from time to time.

Now, we get the name Rapture from verse 17 in the scripture we just read from **1 Thessalonians chapter 4:17, Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.**

It's that phrase "caught up" that people refer to as the Rapture. The Greek word "harpazō" really carries with it the idea of being violently snatched away. In fact, the same word is used in several other places in scripture and in every instance it's a violent snatching away of something or someone.

In Matthew chapter 13 in the parable of the sower when the seed fell by the wayside; the birds came and devoured them, and you can just picture those birds, and how they snatch them away as fast as they can. And in the interpretation, it says that, **"When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes, and snatches away what has been sown in his heart."**

In other words, it's a sudden, violent action. It happens in a split second and very unexpectedly.

So where do we get the word Rapture?

Well, when the New Testament was translated to Latin, the latin word for caught up is "raptuse", which is where we get our English word for caught up, which is Rapture.

Either way it's a very sudden event.

It's not like the second coming of Christ, when **every** eye will see Him coming and **every** person on the earth and all of heaven will witness Jesus descend to the earth, just like He ascended from the earth after His resurrection in Acts chapter 1.

Acts 1:9, Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. 10 And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, 11 who also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”

In other words, He's going to return at His Second Coming just like He left. Only we're going to be with Him and **every** eye is going to see Him as He slowly descends upon the earth, not only in the same manner that He ascended, but also to the same place from where he left.

Zechariah 14:4, And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives (which is the same place from where He ascended), **Which faces Jerusalem on the East. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, From East to West, making a very large valley; Half of the mountain shall move toward the North, and half of it toward the South.**

And then **Revelation 1:7 says, Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.**

Again, this is the Second Coming. Every eye will see Him and those on the earth will mourn because they will know then that there truly is a God in heaven and that there truly is a Son named Jesus and they will see Him coming, not as a little baby or a servant or even a Savior; they will see Him coming as a judge to judge those who refused to believe in Him.

This is the “day of the Lord”; this is the Second Coming. And this is seven years after the Rapture.

Now, in the Book of Matthew in chapter 24, we have Jesus account of both the tribulation period as well as His Second Coming. And I’ve preached an entire series on Matthew chapters 24 & 25, which is available on our website and church app. And I would encourage you to go back and listen to those messages when you have time. They’ll give you a much better understanding of how all this fits together.

In the first part of Matthew chapter 24, Jesus is describing in detail what will be the signs leading up to His second coming. And here he’s describing what will take place during the tribulation. How literally billions of people will perish during all of the judgments that will be poured out upon the art.

And in verse 21 of chapter 24 He says this,

21 For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. 22 And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened.

In other words, for the sake of those who will be saved during the Tribulation Period and survive without being killed for their faith. For their sake, the days are no more than seven years.

And then in verse 29 He says, **29 “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 30 Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the**

earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. 31 And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

The elect in that verse are again, those who have been saved during the tribulation and survived. The rest of the elect, the church, are coming with Jesus from heaven, where they've been for the last seven years. And they're looking down on all this while those on earth are looking up.

And then in verse 36 He says,

36 “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.

Remember He's talking to His disciples and He's telling them what is going to happen at the very end. And He's still in the flesh at this point and so He's chosen not to use all the supernatural abilities available to Him at this time, which includes His omniscience.

But after His resurrection and after He ascends to heaven, He will know all things which includes the time in which He will return. And then He goes on and He says,

37 But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. 38 For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, 39 and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

40 Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. 41 Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left.

Now, a lot of Bible teachers and preachers believe this separation takes place at the Rapture, and that those who are taken are believers or members of the church; and those who are left behind are those who are unbelievers.

And though that's true, that's exactly what happens at the Rapture, the context here is clearly the Second Coming of Christ, not the Rapture.

And because it's the second coming, this is a time of judgment, just like the flood was during the time of Noah. The flood was a type of judgment.

And those who were left behind during the flood, were only 8 who were members of Noah's family and they were kept safe from the waters because they chose to enter the ark. In other words, they were faithful to obey God and to get on the boat.

Everyone else was drowned. Everyone else was taken and judged for their unfaithfulness. All the unbelievers were taken. And in the same way, at the second coming of Christ, those who have been faithful will be spared. They will be gathered from the four winds and be brought to a place of safety and they will remain here on the earth to reign with Christ for the next 1000 years.

But those who refused to believe, they will be gathered together and taken away to be punished while they await the final judgment, which will occur at the Great White Throne Judgment after the 1000 years is up.

And we read about this judgment at the second coming in Matthew chapter 25. It's called the judgment of the nations or the separation of the sheep and the goats.

Matthew 25:31 “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. 32 All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. 33 And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. 34 Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 35 for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; 36 I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’

So, this is the second coming and we’ll be talking more about it in the future.

But what we’re about to see here in chapter four of Revelation begins immediately after the Rapture of the church, just prior to the beginning of the Great Tribulation period.

Now, we’ve all seen the movies, and read the books about the end times; how they portray the things which will occur here on the earth during that time. And how all of the Christians will be suddenly snatched away. And though we don’t know all the details of what will happen at that moment, it will no doubt be a moment of mass confusion and fear for those who will be left behind.

And human logic tells us that there will be plane crashes and automobile accidents and runaway passenger trains and subways and every other mode of transportation catastrophes as people suddenly are taken away.

And no doubt the 911 lines and emergency personnel will be bombarded with calls! And people all over the world will be in a panic, many not having even a clue as to what just happened. But others will be in a panic, because they will know what has happened. And many will be searching for their loved ones and they won't find them. And though some folks will know where their loved ones are, others will be left to wonder. And it'll be total chaos like has never been seen before when this takes place.

Now, there's another scripture where Paul indicates the suddenness of this event. And that's in

1 Corinthians 15:51, Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

Again, this has to be referring to the Rapture, or the snatching away because of the suddenness. In a moment or in the twinkling of an eye; You don't get any more sudden than that. And that's how we know this is the Rapture versus the Second Coming.

One more thing and I'll stop, as we've already studied, the Second Coming will be witnessed by the whole world, every eye will see Him when He comes back at the Second Coming. But not so at the Rapture.

We're told that at the Rapture, the church which includes all born again believers will be caught up into the air to meet Jesus. And there's no mention anywhere that anyone but those who are caught up will see Him.

Those who will be left behind will no doubt see the results of our disappearance, but there's no indication that they'll see what true believers will see.

Because again, this is not the return of Christ to the earth to judge the ungodly and establish His kingdom. There's no judgment in 1 Corinthians 15. There's no judgment in John 14. There's no judgment in 1 Thessalonians 4.

And so there's no need at this point for the Lord to come all the way to the earth. And so He meets us in the air. And those who have died in Christ before us along with every other member of the church, we'll be taken to heaven, to forever be with the Lord!

What a glorious day that will be! And it could happen at any moment! At any moment Jesus could call us home. And so above all else I pray that every person in this room is absolutely positively sure about their salvation. And if not, then I pray you'll make sure before you leave here tonight.

Let's pray together.