

GROWING IN GOD

PODCAST



GIG61 - The Rapture

The rapture doctrine has always been a great concern to me, because I am worried that so many Christians I have spoken to, who believe especially in a pre-tribulation rapture, have built their faith in Jesus and His return on this doctrine, not on a biblical foundation. My concern is that as we move further and further into times of hardship and tribulation, individuals may lose their faith when confronted with what Jesus said was coming onto the earth. Christians may feel that if the rapture doctrine is not true, then nothing they have believed about Jesus is true. Paul's cry was to know Christ, and the power of His resurrection. He lived in a daily walk with God to know Yeshua, Jesus, and have a personal relationship with Him – not an eschatological or end-time doctrine fulfillment.

Since its development, the pre-tribulation rapture theory has been taught in many churches as a fundamental and basic building block of faith in Christ. That, however, is error. The second coming of Christ is fundamental to Christian faith; but to dictate when and how is not. One flaw of much of the rapture teaching, and a major concern that I have personally, is that it removes the need for Christians to grow up and mature in their faith. For instance, why strive to be mature? Why grow? Why go to the cross? Once you are saved, you will just be raptured out from the tribulation and be with Jesus. The truth is that as we move deeper and deeper into the last days, the maturity of each saint is paramount; for if possible, even the very elect will be deceived.

As we go along, we see that there are three basic teachings about the rapture. Note that all of them are connected to the tribulation. There is the pre-tribulation rapture, the post-tribulation rapture, and the mid-tribulation rapture. I know there are other aspects, but I want to focus on these three. One problem with this is that the Scriptures that point to what we call the rapture do not connect the event of Christ's return to the tribulation. Traditionally, Christian faith has been founded upon what is called the second coming, or the return of Christ, where Jesus, Yeshua, the risen Lord, returns to Earth from the right hand of the Father to establish His Kingdom on this earth. This is clearly expressed by Yeshua Himself in the parable of the nobleman.

We look at Luke the nineteenth chapter, verse 11. "While they were listening to these things, Jesus went on to tell a parable, because He was near Jerusalem, and they supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately." Notice that the concern of the disciples here, and their focus, is on the Kingdom of God, and when the Kingdom of God would be established on the earth. It had nothing to do in their minds with the tribulation. Verse 12 goes on to say, "So He said, 'A nobleman went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself, and then return.'" Again, through most of church history, this has been the understanding: Christ was crucified on the cross, He was buried and rose again from the dead. He ascended to the right hand of the Father, waiting to return to Earth and establish His Kingdom. For a pre-tribulation rapture to work, Christ will have to return twice: once to come and rapture up the saints to Himself in the air, and return with them into the heavens, in order to avoid the tribulation that is happening or is going to happen on the earth. Christ would then have to return a second time to set up His Kingdom on the earth, following the tribulation. Another alternative, which some believe, is that

Christ and the saints live through eternity in heaven. Thus, there is not another coming of Christ to the earth. You find much the same problem with the mid-tribulation rapture theory.

I want to look first at First Thessalonians the fourth chapter, because this is one of the main chapters in the Scriptures that is used to discuss, or to prove, if you will, the reality of a rapture or a catching up to be with the Lord. So we are in First Thessalonians, chapter four, starting at verse 13. "But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope." Now, first of all, in this portion of Scripture, I want to point out the fact that Paul is addressing something very specific. He is addressing the concern of the saints in Thessalonica about those saints, other saints who have passed away – they have died – and they are not sure what happened with them. And so they are asking him a very specific question of what is their faith about those who have died. Again, Paul in these verses is not attempting to address the tribulation, nor is he attempting to address the concept of a rapture. But we will go on with verses 14-18: "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words."

The comfort is because now they understand that those who have passed away, at the coming of the Lord will be resurrected, and they will be caught up to be with the Lord at that time. This was the situation he was addressing. But these verses have become kind of the proof text for the fact that there is what is termed a rapture, or if you want to say, a catching up to the Lord in the air at His second coming. These verses really are the best confirmation through the Scriptures that there will be a catching up of the saints from the earth to be with the Lord. There is no mention, however, of the tribulation, or any relationship or timing of this event of the second coming of Christ to the tribulation. We have to be very clear about that. Furthermore, the event is shown to be immediately following the dead in Christ being resurrected, and the saints also being caught up and ever being with the Lord.

This terminology seems to point to the final tabernacling of God and His Son, Messiah, dwelling on Earth with His people. Let's look at John 14, verse 23. "Jesus answered and said to him, 'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.'" So again, we must be solid on this idea that Christ at His return establishes His Kingdom on this earth. He does not dwell forever in heaven. He is not bringing the saints up into heaven to be with Him in heaven forever. That is not our eternal dwelling place. Our eternal dwelling place is with Him in this realm on this earth. Revelation 21:3 says, "And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them.'" Again, we see very clearly from Revelation that the tabernacling of God, the dwelling of Christ, is among men. He returns to Earth, which again, I want to emphasize this has been the historical belief of the church for many, many years up until the advent of what is called the rapture doctrine. Christ was seen as returning to the earth, and Christ taught that He would return to the earth. That is the parable of the nobleman, which we have already read.

The other Scripture that is used to prove the rapture doctrine as it has been taught is in First Corinthians 15:50-52, and we will begin reading there. "Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit

the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, 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 will be changed." How are we changed? We are changed into the same imperishable that those who are resurrected from the dead come into. We know that while beholding Him, we are changed from glory to glory into His image. So the image of the change, or the image of the imperishable, is the resurrected Christ. And everyone, whether they had previously passed away and been buried, or whether they were still remaining on Earth at His coming, everyone will be changed into this image, imperishable image, of the resurrected Christ.

Verses 53-58 go on to say, "For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, 'Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?' The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord." There are a couple of points here. Again, this is not necessarily addressing in any way being caught up to the Lord in the air; and it is not in any way addressing the tribulation, or times of tribulation. It does address death, that once this takes place, this change into the imperishable, then it says, "O death, where is your sting?" Now we know from other Scriptures that the last enemy is death. So again, we assume that if death is ended through this process, then the last enemy of all enemies, including those who are around during the tribulation, have been dealt with, and that is all over. So the last enemy is death, and death has lost its sting at this particular time when we are all changed into this imperishable image. He then goes on to say, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." He tells us to keep working and to keep toiling in our relationship with the Lord; and that is something that we do while we are here on the earth. So obviously, there has not been a catching up to be with Christ in the air, or to be in the heavens, or something like that; nor has the Kingdom necessarily been set up. We continue to work and to labor in the Lord, which is something that we should all be doing with all of our hearts.

Once again, we see that nothing in these verses is addressing the tribulation. In fact, here in First Corinthians, there is no mention of being caught up to Christ in the air. What the two verses have in common, when we talk about Corinthians and Thessalonians, is a reference to the trumpet. Now the term the last trump that is used in First Corinthians does not appear anywhere else in the Scriptures, either in English or in Greek. In other words, you cannot tie that terminology of last trump to another Scripture. You can't, say, reach into the book of Revelation or something and try to point out where in the tribulation this is taking place. It is used many times as a proof of what happens in a process of the rapture, but it cannot be tied to a timing of tribulation; and it cannot be tied to a timing as far as being, like Thessalonians, talking about being caught up to be with the Lord. So that is very important to recognize from the Scripture here in First Corinthians. There is nowhere to find a like Scripture throughout the Bible.

If we then look at this idea, "Well, they are both referring to a trumpet," both Corinthians and Thessalonians are referring to these events taking place surrounding the sound of a trumpet blast that comes. This is saying the last trump; that is not how Thessalonians refers to it, but it does refer to the trump of God. And so if we try to track the concept of the trumpets, of course we find mostly in the book of Revelation where the trumpet is being used to announce different phases and timings of what is

taking place in the end-time, and what is taking place in what could be considered aspects of the tribulation. If we go to Revelation to look for this, then we really see that probably the closest illustration that we can find in the book of Revelation is about the seventh trump. That seems to align itself mostly with what Corinthians and Thessalonians are talking about. If we look at Revelation 11:15, this would probably be the most likely candidate. However, the seventh trump seems to be sounded at the end of the tribulation, and it seems to be announcing the glorious establishment of the Kingdom of God on Earth. Let's read it. "Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever.'" This is obviously the establishment of the Kingdom, which means the tribulation time is over. So if we do try to tie these to a trumpet sound, this is the most likely trumpet to tie these Scriptures into. And they are not talking about something that would be pre-tribulation or mid-tribulation; they are talking about events that are after the tribulation.

So now again, the purpose of this podcast, and I want to be clear with this, is not to really get swallowed up in a doctrinal dispute about the second coming of Christ. Instead, what I want to focus on is the fact that we, as Christians, need to be prepared for whatever we may face in the days ahead of us. The Bible tells us that in the last days, there will be times of trouble, persecution, and tribulation. The Scriptures are also very clear that Christians must prepare to walk with faith through these times, and to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom to all of the world. Because it says that the Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in all the world, and then will the end come. That means that the end doesn't come without that event. And it means the saints of God are here on Earth to preach that, even in and through the time of the tribulation. So, again, I don't want to argue the doctrine of rapture here where it relates to tribulation. What I am concerned about is things I have heard people talk about, how their faith is tied to this idea of a rapture. And if they are not raptured out and they all of a sudden wake up one day, which we could be close to those days, and find themselves in the tribulation times, and in times of great persecution, then will their faith stand? Will they have done the homework in their walk with God to be strong in faith and strong in their relationship with Yeshua, with the Lord Himself, filled with the Holy Spirit, in order to persevere during these times?

Remember, it says, "He that endures to the end will be saved." Our faith must carry us through. Our walk with God must be strong enough to get us through any of these days and bring us right up to the end, where Christ appears and returns to this earth. Any lack of doing that, any teaching that is lulling us to sleep and giving us a false sense of security as believers, that makes us not prepare in spiritual growth and maturity, is placing us in the category of being the foolish virgins that Christ spoke of in Matthew 25. And I'll read it, beginning at verses 1-5: "Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were prudent. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps. Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep." In other words, things didn't really work out as they thought; they didn't find themselves immediately facing the return of the Lord. Other things, other events transpired, and they had to wait through those events for the bridegroom's appearance. Sounds familiar to some of the other Scriptures we have been reading. Verses 6-9: "But at midnight there was a shout, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.'" Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the prudent, "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out." But the prudent answered, "No, there will not be enough for us and you too; go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.""

In other words, we are going to have what we need to make it through this time. We can't give somebody else our faith. Somebody else cannot walk in our relationship with the Lord. They must have their own. Verse 10 says, "And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in." We must be ready. We all must be ready. Each individual believer must be ready. "And those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. Later the other virgins also came, saying, "Lord, lord, open up for us." But he answered, "Truly I say to you, I do not know you." Be the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour."

We don't really know thoroughly the events. We know the basic reality that the Lord ascended to the right hand of the Father, and He has promised us that He is returning. That we know. When we try to put a lot of these other details in, we could be creating problems for ourselves. At the Lord's coming, we must be prepared for whatever we will face. Some may say, "What if you are wrong, and there is a pre-tribulation rapture of the Church?" Well, then I would simply say, "My striving to grow and mature in God and have a deep relationship with Him, and a relationship of faith that can carry me through the difficult days and possibly even allow me to be a vessel of Christ during those days, to be one who is preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom until the end – then, I have lost nothing if there is a pre-tribulation rapture. It hasn't damaged my walk with God." But if people have not prepared, they are the ones who should be concerned.

I know I live in an area that is prone to hurricanes, and to not prepare for the worst during hurricane season is very foolish. We all live now as believers in an age that is prone to persecution, to tribulation, to martyrdom; and for us to not prepare ourselves spiritually to survive during these days is altogether foolishness. You realize it is estimated that seventy million Christians have died as martyrs since the Ascension of Christ, and that thousands of Christians are martyred every year. Now we in the West may seem to have been buffered from these realities, and so it is not real to us what it takes to walk. It is not clear to us the spiritual preparation and the level of faith in maturity in God, as sons of God, that it takes for us to walk through times of stress, through times of persecution. But to pretend we are not going to face those things really is foolishness. Whatever we do, we should prepare.

I think a good prayer for the Body of Christ in these days might be found in Luke 22:42 – "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done." That is what the heart of Christ was; that is what His prayer was; that is what His hope was. We too, knowing that we are facing these days, these last days in which tribulations will come, should pray that same prayer – "Lord, if it is Your will, save me from going through these things. However, not my will, but Your will for my life be done, Lord." And I pray that you be prepared for what His will is for you in these days.

I want to make final points. Number one, focus on God through His prophecies and promises. Let Him be your focus. Christ has planted you in this earth to grow and mature into His son. And Christ is coming again, and we will be caught up and gathered to Him. And the Father and Son are coming to make Their abode with us in Messiah's Kingdom on this earth; so we shall always be with the Lord, as First Thessalonians 4:17 says. Be filled with faith. Reach in, and grow up in God. Mature into His vessels that He has planted us in this earth to become. It may not be easy, but we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. Amen.