

Raptured up into glory – Part 1

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- [0 : 00] Good morning. Welcome here this morning as we worship together.
- Thank you, Pedro, for reading the passage here this morning. As we gather here, we're gathered in the name of Jesus.
- And Jesus is why we're here. He is central. He is everything. And we have placed our faith in Him.
- And because of that, we have beautiful passages like were just read for us, where they speak of hope and promise.
- Hope and promise. There is a future for us. And especially appropriate as this past week with the passing of Joshua, and we have a funeral here this afternoon, these passages are so meaningful to believers.
- [1 : 27] And we cling to them. So as we've been starting to go through the prophetic teachings of the Scriptures, this morning I was going to touch in and start on what we call the rapture.
- And so that's what's in store for us in the next half hour. Do we believe in the rapture?
- Does anybody struggle with that concept? Or we're scared to put up our hands maybe? You know, how many of us were taught that there would be a rapture as a child?
- There's only a handful. And there's, I think, a reason for it.
- I know as a younger believer, when I was first exposed to God's program, I wrestled with it. Can it be true?
- [2 : 39] This is too good to be true. What was my thoughts? And why wasn't I taught this as a child?
- And I've wrestled with this, and yet it's in Scripture. Not only in Thessalonians, as was read for other places. And as we understand God's program, we realize, yes, God has this in store for the church.
- And so this morning we want to look at that. I know from questions from some of you that there have been struggles with this.
- And so I thought it would be good to teach on it and to look into it. You know, some have said, and I've struggled with this too in the past, why would God take me out and let the rest of the world suffer through the tribulation?
- Am I better than them? Well, that's human reasoning. And we are not better than them, but we have been saved by the grace of God.
- [3 : 55] And the tribulation program is not determined for the church. And as we understand that, we realize it's not for our goodness that He's taken us out, but it's for His purpose.
- It's for His glory, for His honor. And so as we look at it that way, it's easier to accept. So as we look at why is there a struggle in teaching in maybe in some of our backgrounds, and I think especially in traditional Mennonite circles, this has been a struggle.
- And I dug into it somewhat. And we have to go back to a teaching called Millennialism. And Millennial meaning a thousand years.

And so how we view a thousand-year reign, as is described in the Scriptures, how we look at that determines how I see all of prophecy.

It determines how I view God's return as well. And so I want to look at that word for a few minutes here.

[5 : 18] And there's three views to the Millennial Kingdom. And the first one is amillennial. It's the word millennial with an A in front of it.

And when we put the word A in front of it, what does that signify? What does that mean? Does anyone know? The absence of.

Let's take this into a different context. We have the word atheist. What does atheist mean? No God.

Right? The word theist means there's a God. You add the word A in front, no God. Millennialism, amillennialism.

Millennial is a thousand-year reign. The A in front of it, there is no thousand-year period. And all of Scripture that refers to this time period then has to be spiritualized.

[6 : 28] It means something else. And we don't know what it means. So with this view of amillennialism, it means there's no millennial period.

And then we're stuck with what does the Scripture refer to for this time period. And every one of us can use our own imagination to determine.

And so that's the first view. The second one is post-millennialism. And what does the word post mean? After.

And so it's a reference to the return of Christ will happen after. So there will be a thousand-year reign here on earth.

And at the end of that thousand years, Jesus will come and rule. And set up His kingdom. Well, that conflicts with all of Scripture.

[7 : 31] And has not even one verse that I can find to back it. Not even one verse. And so the whole concept of the thousand-year reign is that Jesus will be here as King, ruling during this time.

And so if He would come after, the thought behind it is that the church will be used of God to make this world a better place and to usher in the coming of Christ.

That's the concept behind post-millennialism. And so many different groups, even in the Muslim world, they hold strongly to that.

And the movement by them, we have to prepare the world for the coming of the Messiah. And in their minds, Israel has to go in order for that to happen.

And so that's post-millennialism. And then the third one is pre-millennialism. And that means simply that we are living before the millennialism.

[8 : 55] The millennial period is yet to come. And it will be ushered in with the return of Christ. And so when Jesus comes back, that period will start.

And that's the one that is by far the most scriptural. And as we understand that, even the rapture fits in.

It's the only way that we can understand teachings on the rapture. It's pre-millennialism. And that the thousand-year reign will begin when Jesus comes back.

I grew up and was taught that as we neared the end of the world, of life here, things would get worse and worse.

And towards the end, there would be the number 666. And it would be a terrible time here on earth. And shortly after that, God would return in judgment and it would be heaven or hell.

[10 : 22] Period. Period. Can some of you identify? This teaching comes from a millennialism.

It comes from a viewpoint there is no millennium. and it's from that, from that set of eyes that we have been taught or some of us at least.

And a little background on that. In the church age, in the beginning of the church age, in the, in the apostolic age, prevalent was the teaching of the imminent return of Christ.

Meaning imminent any day Jesus may return. Paul taught that through his letters and especially in Thessalonians.

That was a topic he taught very thoroughly in both letters and while he was there in person. and so the the return of Christ to come at any point.

[11 : 38] As we read church history and the early church fathers of the first and second centuries, they almost inclusively held to that view.

But then in the third and fourth centuries, there a shift started to happen and we have in the third century or after 300 years, we have Constantine becoming the Roman emperor and declaring Christianity to be the religion of their kingdom and pushing it on them.

You need to belong to the church and so that influenced. Following him, there was a fellow by the name of Augustine who was instrumental in teaching amillennialism.

There is no thousand year reign and it was grounded in that era. And so hence, the Catholic Church has from its birth sort of throughout the centuries kept that view and they're still teaching it today.

And yet we left we left in the Reformation movement in the 1500s but this is one of the teachings that followed us that was never clarified and hence that's an explanation why many of us our parents didn't know and because that's what followed.

[13 : 36] So it's an explanation of why there's sometimes opposition to this kind of teaching that God literally pulled the church up into heaven and what a glorious teaching that is.

Why would God do this? And we're going to look at a few things. I'm going to do this in a two-part message because our morning's going to be a bit shorter so we're going to finish next Sunday Lord willing.

But there's a number of reasons and maybe not all of them that I have here but the first one why would God remove the church?

Why would He remove the church? Well we read in Daniel and we looked at the prophecy of the 70 weeks and the 70th week which we talked about was the tribulation period is determined upon which people?

Israel the Jewish people and so God's program is going to shift from the church back to the Jews and during the last week He has to remove the church out of the way and refocus on the Jews and that is what He has promised.

[15 : 21] The Jewish wedding has often been used to exemplify God's program between Himself and the church.

The Bible speaks repeatedly of the church as the bride of Christ and Jesus as the bridegroom. And in the Jewish wedding setting that was in history is that the when the marriage agreement was made or arranged for the groom had selected the bride and the deal was made often between both sets of parents and so we're talking in real life today and then the groom would go away for an undetermined amount of time and prepare a home and then he would come back after sometimes it could be six months or a year he would come back unexpectedly for his bride to take her home and that pictures

Jesus coming to die on the cross and and to and to initiate this this relationship between the groom and the bride who would come out of out of the cross people like yourselves this morning who have given your hearts to Jesus we are the bride of Christ and and so after that Jesus went to heaven to prepare a place for us and at an unexpected time he will come for the bride and take her to be with him the rapture Israel is never in scripture considered or referred to as the bride but always the wife of God and the church is the bride of Christ and as we see that we realize

God has every intention of taking his bride home to us or to himself so that is that is part of God's reasoning or his purpose there I want to read in Romans 11 verse 25 if you want you can turn with me there Romans 11 and the entire chapter of Romans 11 speaks of why has God put Israel aside for a time period and why has the church come in and he states in this chapter that he has used the church to drive them to jealousy but there will come a time when

God will again turn to the Jews verse 25 for I do not desire brethren that you should be ignorant of this mystery lest you should be wise in your own eyes that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in so blindness on the part of Israel has occurred until the fullness of the Gentiles or the fullness of the church age is a reference to when it is finished when it has run its course it's complete and this is a reference to God removing the church largely Gentile now Paul says the mystery of the church is that Jew and

[20 : 03] Gentile alike by faith belong into the church we know factually that there are very few Jews who accept Jesus Christ as the Savior and by and large they have rejected him but there are some and they belong to the church and not to Israel they become the family of the bride and so this is also part of God's purpose and then lastly as a as a reason why would God remove the church and I'm going to just briefly look at this and then next Sunday we'll dig into it more second Thessalonians chapter two verses six through eight and it's talking about the rapture and what's holding back what's keeping the rapture from happening or what's keeping the antichrist from being revealed verse six through eight in second

Thessalonians two and now you know what is restraining that he may be revealed in his own time for the mystery of lawlessness is already at work only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way and then the lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will consume with the breath of his mouth and destroy with the brightness of his coming Paul is addressing here in these verses what is keval and the antichrist from from appearing today what what is stopping the program from the antichrist forming the one world government and and in his reign of evil and wickedness during the seven years and and Paul brings in the mystery of lawlessness and he says a referring to a restraining force he that restraineth must be removed and it uses the word he it's a person and it is a reference to the

Holy Spirit at work on earth through the church restraining evil can we picture can we imagine for a moment if every Christian was gone probably we can't because we've never been there that's what's going to happen and and so Paul is teaching us that the antichrist cannot be revealed till the restraining force is lifted and today the restrainer the Holy Spirit works through you and me the church and we're restraining across the globe because there's believers scattered throughout the entire world they're keeping evil somewhat at bay and and you know it seems to be rising evil not seems to be it is and yet there it's still being restrained it's there are boundaries in place and it's when God removes the church that that is going to be gone and it's going to go wild like never before so that is the last reason why why will

God remove the church it is so the last weeks and years can come and that program can start and so this this morning we we read in in the fourth chapter of first Thessalonians and and I'm going to just briefly touch into that it's the clearest teaching of the rapture the clearest reference to it and I'm going to just take a couple minutes here and then we're going to close for this morning and take it up later so turn with me to 1st Thessalonians 4 so Paul is writing of course to the church and he says I don't want you to be ignorant or without knowledge brethren concerning those who have fallen asleep less you sorrow as others who have no hope so it's a message of comfort and

Paul says I'm writing this so that you know what's going to happen to those who have fallen asleep in the Lord and when it comes to believers and death the New Testament always refers to sleep in the Lord sleeping in the Lord and so that's the case here and so Paul is addressing this and he says less you sorrow as others who have no hope you we need to know what is God's plan and so then he says if we believe that Jesus died and rose again even so God will bring with him those who sleep in Jesus if we are in the faith and that Jesus died and rose it's crucial or instrumental core values of our faith that

[26 : 44] Jesus is our Savior who died for us and rose again and so if we believe that he says God will bring with him those who sleep those who have gone on before us and if there's any any of the Reimer family here this morning it includes Joshua will bring him back with him 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 so it's talking about a time period there will be a church here on earth and when the Lord returns those that are alive have not died he says they will not go ahead of those who have died and it's referring to the resurrection where we will receive our new bodies and he says those loved ones who have died will not be left behind in fact they will go ahead of you and the

Lord will bring them with him when he comes back down to meet us in the clouds and their bodies will be resurrected and changed and then we will meet them in the air for the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout of an archangel and with the trumpet of God and the dead in Christ will rise first and 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 be with the Lord therefore comfort one another with these words and it is exactly that it's so reassuring to know God has this figured out he has a plan and our loved ones will not remain in the grave in fact they will be resurrected and we will follow and when

I say we will follow I'm referring to the church that's alive at the return of Christ it may be us or some of us it may not be and so we look forward to that day and so I'm going to close because of the funeral just to shorten things up a bit so let's let's prayer Lord we thank you for wonderful promises thank you for the teaching of your word on these matters and Lord all of it speaks of hope a living hope that we have in you Lord and that even though we are we go through pain and suffering here on earth but you have an eternal plan to bring us to yourself and even with the rapture Lord help us to not be focused on human thinking but rather Lord on yours on your power and so we just commit these things to you Lord in the name of Jesus Christ

Amen and we'll have a closing song I am I gamma