

## Message #17 of *Scripture Beneath The Surface* “Rapture - When?”

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Hello! Thanks for being with us. Today I'd like to ask the question, "When is the rapture?" There is confusion in the church today over whether the rapture will occur before or after the Great Tribulation. I'd like to make it clear from the beginning that I firmly believe that Christians will go through tribulation. There will be no pre-tribulation rapture. The pre-tribulation rapture theory is accepted by many Christians, but the birth of this theory was developed in error, and has been further perpetuated by a misunderstanding of the definition of 'Tribulation', as opposed to the term, 'Wrath of God'. The initial development of the pre-tribulation theory sprung up in the 1800s by a minister named Darby.

As the story goes, the minister was attending a church service, and a woman prophesied concerning the end-time rapture. Exactly what she prophesied is not really clear, but the minister apparently believed that her prophecy stated that God's people would not suffer the pouring out of the wrath of God. Darby was intrigued with the concept, and went home and studied the prophesies of the Bible, and came to the conclusion of two things.

His first assumption was that God's people would not suffer the wrath of God. This was a correct conclusion. The other conclusion Darby came to was that the Great tribulation and the Wrath of God were one in the same, that they were identical with each other. This part of Darby's conclusion was incorrect. But because Darby believed that the Great Tribulation referred to in Matthew 24, was identical with the wrath of God, he therefore surmised that Christians would not suffer tribulation.

After coming to these two conclusions, the one part correct, and the other part incorrect, Darby began to preach his new doctrinal conclusions. This doctrine caught on, not because it was true, but because of the inaccuracy of the definitions of tribulation, and wrath of God. People quickly agreed that God would not pour his wrath upon his own righteous people. They didn't stop to question the fact as to whether or not the Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord's Wrath, were one in the same.

Now, if the Wrath of God and the Great Tribulation were identical, then Darby's assumption could readily be accepted. I don't know of anyone who thinks that God would pour out his wrath upon his own righteous people. But the Bible teaches us that Christians will endure tribulation, and that tribulation comes from wicked sources against Christians, not from God. Even Jesus, speaking to his disciples in Matthew 24, is telling them that

tribulation is coming upon God's people and that it is coming from wicked sources who want to destroy the work of the gospel. What does come from God is his wrath which is poured out upon the wicked.

So, how do we know for certain that the Great Tribulation and the Wrath of God are two completely separate events? Actually, this is very easy to determine. Scripture shows us that the Great Tribulation and the Wrath of God are two completely separate things which are separated by one major event. This event is the event that takes place at the opening of the sixth seal in Revelation 6:12-13, which is the darkening of the sun and moon, and the stars falling from heaven. This event is mentioned in the Bible many times. According to scripture, the Great Tribulation takes place before this event, and the Wrath of God takes place afterward.

We find part of the description for this in Matthew 24:29, where it says that the event of the sun and moon darkening, will take place after the tribulation. This gives us a starting order of events which first is, the Great Tribulation, and then following that the sun and moon being darkened and the stars falling from heaven.

Now we'll go to Joel 2:31, where it that shows that the day of the Lord, when he pours out his wrath upon the wicked, takes place after the sun and moon are darkened, and the stars fall from heaven. Remember, we just read in Matthew 24:29 that the Great Tribulation happens before the sun and moon are darkened, and now we will read the verse that shows that the Day of the Lord's wrath takes place after the sun and moon are darkened. Listen to this verse in Joel, chapter 2. It reads, "The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD comes."

Notice that the verse said that the sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars will fall from heaven before the great and terrible Day of the Lord comes. This is very important, because now we have an order to the events which shows that the Great Tribulation comes first, then the sun and moon are darkened, and the stars fall from heaven. Then comes the great and terrible Day of the Lord. By this we can clearly see that the Great Tribulation, and the Day of the Lord's wrath, are two completely separate things, for they are separated by the event of the sun and moon darkening, with the stars falling from heaven.

Initially, back in the 1800s in England, when Darby heard the woman prophesy, he was under the incorrect assumption that the Great Tribulation was the Wrath of God, which will be poured out on the wicked during the 'Great and Terrible Day of the Lord', mentioned in Joel, chapter 2. And because he knew, as well as we know today, that God will not pour out his wrath on his own righteous people, he came to the logical assumption that the church would have to be taken out of the world before the Great Tribulation. And this assumption of his gave rise to the doctrine of a pre-tribulation rapture theory, which many people have accepted, and which has been further embedded in people's minds by the recent "Left Behind" series of novels. And the reason this erroneous doctrine is accepted so easily is that people are told that the Great Tribulation is the Wrath of God, and then they are told that God wouldn't pour out his wrath on his own people. When a person doesn't know scripture, they will usually agree very quickly that God would not pour out his wrath upon his own righteous people, but they never stop and think whether or not the Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord's Wrath are the same thing. The part that says that God wouldn't pour out his wrath on his own righteous people, is true, but the part that says that the Great Tribulation is the wrath of God, is false.

The pre-tribulation rapture theory is a very deceptive doctrine, and is destroying many people. It destroys them by giving them a false sense of ease, making them think that they will be removed from the earth before the major end-time events of the world take place. This means that they think they will be raptured, and then the antichrist will come, and then the mark of the beast will come. But in truth, the antichrist, spoken of by John in 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> John, and the mark of the beast, spoken of in Revelation 13, are already here. Satan does not want people to know this, and has created the doctrine of pre-tribulation rapture as a smokescreen so that people will not realize how the antichrist and the mark of the beast work in the world. By making the people fasten their eyes on what they think is a future event, he tricks them into not being ready to deal with the evil he is doling out to them. He is like a magician, for he is the great magician. When a magician wants to pull something out of his sleeve, he creates a diversion so that the audience will not look at his sleeve. He wants them to look anywhere else but at his sleeve. Satan has done this with the pre-tribulation theory. Christians are so busy looking for the rapture, that they can't see that the antichrist is already in the world, just like the apostle John said in 1 John 4:3 that antichrist shall come, and even now is already in the world.

If antichrist was already in the world in John's day, then antichrist isn't a future event to come. What is yet to come is many false Christs and false prophets, just as Jesus predicted in Matthew 24. These are antichrist because of their anti-Christ position, in that they are an opposition force against Jesus Christ. There will be some false Christs that come who will be more significant than others, and I personally believe we will definitely see a rising up of at least one significant false Christ figure in the last days, but the spirit of antichrist and the image of the beast are already at work, but many Christians are deceived into thinking that this danger will not come until they are taken out of the world.

But Satan doesn't want Christians to shore up their faith, nor to defend it. He wants them to lay back and become carnal Christians, worldly Christians, who will not see the danger until it is too late. A great number of Christians of today are not searching for truth, because they think everything is already in place for their soon rapture, and then they can leave the worries of any old antichrist to the poor slobs who didn't make it during the first round. But there isn't going to be a second round. And the first round won't take place until there comes a trial upon the whole earth which will try men's souls, as referred to in Revelation 3:10.

When I say that there isn't going to be a second round, I mean that there is only one resurrection prior to the coming of Jesus. This is also an important part of scripture which is overlooked by those who subscribe to the pre-tribulation rapture theory. The pre-tribulation rapture theory assumes that those who are ready for the Lord's return will be raptured, meaning caught up into the air, at his return, and that the dead who are in Christ will be resurrected. So far, this is correct. But then the theory claims that those people who called themselves Christians, but who were not serving the Lord as they should, would miss the rapture, and then would have to experience death by being beheaded.

But this is contrary to scripture, because the Bible tells us that there is only one resurrection before Jesus comes, and that there will not be another resurrection until after the 1000 years of Christ's reign on Earth. In fact, it tells us that after the dead in Christ are raised in the first resurrection, the rest of the dead do not live again until after the 1000 year 'millennial' reign of Christ is over. Then there will be a resurrection of the wicked dead for the Great White Throne Judgment. We can read about this in Revelation 20:4-6. It says, "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and who had not worshiped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. 5 But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy is he that has part in the first resurrection: on such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him for a thousand years."

Notice that verse six refers to those who are in the first resurrection, and that verse five says that the rest of the dead, all the others who are dead, will not live again until after the millennial reign. We know that the first resurrection has to take place at the rapture of the church, because the Bible is also very clear that no one will go to meet the Lord without the righteous dead. It says this in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17.

So, if the first resurrection takes place at the Lord's coming, and the righteous dead are resurrected, and if the rest of the dead do not live until after the 1000 year reign of Christ, then what happens the pre-tribulation theory's supposed second group of unprepared Christians who are supposed to be martyred by being beheaded? If the rest of the dead do not live again until after the 1000 year reign, then how would these beheaded people join Jesus Christ and the rest of the Christians who made it in the first resurrection? The answer is, "they can't." In order for beheaded persons, who are not ready at the Lord's coming, to get to heaven, there would need to be another resurrection. And another point, if no resurrection were needed, and they just kind of show up there, as one eminent theologian suggested, then why would there need to be a first resurrection either. If we could just show up in heaven with Jesus, then no resurrection is needed.

Actually, the pre-tribulation rapture theory was put forth as a doctrine which allowed Christians to circumvent the Great Tribulation. The spirit behind this doctrine is not the Holy Spirit, but Satan's evil spirit, who wants to lull Christians into being complacent. It is a deceptive doctrine that shuns the Bible's teaching of preparation for the Lord's return. Satan does not want the church to be concerned with preparing for the return of Jesus, but is telling them that they are just fine the way they are. Instead of acting like a bride who is preparing for the coming of her

bridegroom, the church is acting like the five virgins of Matthew 25 who ran out of oil at the last minute and were unprepared to enter in to the wedding feast.

Another point to consider, is, “Where did the concept come from, that a second group of Christians, who were unprepared for Christ’s coming, have to be beheaded by guillotine?” The answer to that question must include the clear realization that it is not a Biblical concept. The guillotine is not mentioned in scripture. And the beheading that Revelation 20:4, talks about is the symbolic removal, by Christians, of their own head in order that Christ might be your head. This concept is described clearly in 1 Corinthians 11:3. The reference of Revelation 20:4, is not suggesting that a person is killed by wicked people because of their confession of Christ, but is referring to Christians setting their own lives aside in order that Christ might rule them. To be beheaded is to stop letting your head control you, and let Christ be your head, to let Christ be in control of your words and actions. If you would like further insight into this concept, write to us and request the free CD or transcript of Message #5, “Do You Really Know Christ?” Or request the free “Image of the Beast” series, which is much more comprehensive.

The misinterpretation of Revelation 20:4 of being beheaded with a guillotine is another problem with the pre-tribulation rapture theory in that in order to have Christians escape the tribulation, there must be something to explain the fact that scripture refers to God’s people being present for it in some way. Therefore, the theory jumps to a conclusion that these must be Christians who didn’t go in the first resurrection because they weren’t ready. Notice that in the “Left Behind” theory, it is weak Christians who are suffering tribulation. The incorrect meaning of the beheading by guillotine provides an excuse for how these apparently non-prepared Christians can be redeemed after all. But this is poor theology, for it substitutes man’s physical death for Christ’s death for us on the cross. In essence, Satan has introduced a doctrine which tells man that he can save himself by dying physically. But salvation cannot be attained by dying. That is the works part that follows salvation. But salvation itself is free, and comes ONLY by accepting the atoning sacrifice of Christ. The guillotine beheading doctrine is a cleverly concocted lie which does away with salvation by faith in the Son of God, and replaces it with salvation by man’s own obedience.

The bottom line is that there will be Great Tribulation which comes upon the earth to try men’s souls, and then the second coming of the Lord which will bring about the first resurrection. After this takes place, and God’s children are safely with Jesus Christ, then the wrath of the Lord will be poured out upon the wicked. There will be no second chance, and if you’re not prepared for the Lord’s coming, you will be left behind; permanently. The story of the ten virgins in Matthew 25 was not put in the Bible to be ignored. If you’re not prepared when the bridegroom comes, if you don’t have enough oil for your lamp, you will be shut out, and the door will not open for you when you pound on it and cry to be let in. And there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth by those who thought they were ready and found out too late that they weren’t.

In Matthew 16, Mark 9, and Luke 9, there is reference to those who would not taste of death until they see the Son of Man come in his kingdom. Various explanations are given as to the meaning. Some say that Jesus was saying that the apostle John would never die. Some say that there were some of them standing there at the time Jesus was preaching who would be alive six days later when the transfiguration on the mount occurred, and Moses and Elijah were seen. Neither of these interpretations are correct. Besides, it would be a little silly to say that some would still be alive if you’re only referring to a time period which was six days later. What Jesus was telling them was that many people who heard his words would not apply them to their lives and die out to self, but would only call themselves Christians, but continue to live for themselves. They would not crucify that man of flesh; they would not die daily, as was expressed by the apostle Paul. Instead of crucifying the old man of the flesh, and dying out to self, and living for the Lord Jesus, they would just call themselves Christians but continue to keep their own head on their shoulders. Consequently, in the symbolic sense, they would not behead themselves by removing their own head as the controlling factor and replacing it with the head of Christ. The head controls the body. If Jesus is not your head, then your body is not the body of Christ. Whichever head is on the shoulders, that body belongs to it. You can’t claim to be the body of Christ if your own head tells your body what to do. Jesus was the example for us who allowed his own head to be replaced with the head of God, just like it says in 1 Corinthians 11:3, so that he could perfectly accomplish the Father’s works.

So, you can say, “Randy, why would God allow his people to go through a Great Tribulation? We know that tribulation is common to Christians, but why a Great Tribulation?” The answer to that is quite simple, actually. It is referred to in many ways in scripture, but is just simply this. When Jesus comes back, everyone on this earth will experience an end to their earthly life. All through history, people lived their lives until such time as God

determined they would die. People worked out their salvation over their entire life span. Some life spans were longer, some were shorter. But at the time Jesus comes, there will be no more time for working out your salvation. Every person, whether old or young, will come to the end of their time of opportunity for choosing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and for demonstrating that choice in the form of service to him. In order for judgment to be pronounced, the Great Tribulation period must take place to give the final test as to whether or not each person truly loves God, or whether they truly love the things of this world.

When Jesus comes in the clouds of heaven, he will reap his harvest. Those who are ready will go with him. Those who are not ready will weep, for they will be shut out from the marriage supper of the Lamb, forever.