

THE RAPTURE

“Vanished...Without A Trace”

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Imagine this if you could the vanishing of the church before the world in a split second. One Christian man shared it this way, “Every country will find itself in turmoil. Each government will have to act as quickly as possible to prevent a wild tide of anarchy and terrorism. Strong measures will be put into effect. Millions of people will suddenly disappear from the face of the earth, including all of the infant children. From all walks of life, and from virtually every phase of life, there shall be people missing. The freeways, subways, airports and streets will be in shambles as many engineers, pilots, bus drivers and a multitude of private car owners shall suddenly be caught up out of this world. It will be many days before they can unscramble the mangled cars, trains and fallen aircraft. Remaining millions of people will be wailing, dazed and shaken by the event. They shall be frantically striving to locate loved ones in all of the rubble of broken cars and amid broken storefronts and smashed residences.

Communications will be greatly disrupted. Many key persons shall disappear and much of the lines of communications which are still above ground will be broken by crashes of cars and aircraft. Distraught and searching multitudes will jam and overload the communication lines and systems that do remain.

Dazed and confused pleas from bewildered men over the “alert” systems will try to bring about some semblance of order. Policemen, firemen and rescue crews will work around the clock. Hospitals will overflow. Emergency shelters and first-aid stations will be inadequate. The Red Cross and all other emergency units, plus the army facilities will still not be enough.

Opportunists will add to the confusion and the misery by looting and killing. They shall feel that under such a total emergency they can get away with anything. **CHAOS WILL BE ON EVERY HAND.**

While that may sound like an event out of some motion picture, the reality is, according to the Bible that there is coming a day in which, there will be a massive “vanishing” from the earth. Why? It

will be the day of the Rapture of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ unto Himself.

1. THE BIBLE DECLARES THE TRUTH OF THE RAPTURE. While the word “rapture” does not appear that way in Scripture, nonetheless, the Bible makes clear that there will be a “rapture” of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Paul’s letter to these saints in Thessalonica, God uses Paul to reveal a “mystery” that has been held deep within the mind of God. Paul is speaking very matter of fact, for what he has received has come from the Lord God Himself. Paul isn’t speaking of some “belief” or “new idea”, but he is speaking by the very Word of God. He is proclaiming a divine truth from the very heart of God, that has not been revealed before.

When Paul is speaking, to the saints, there is a term that Paul uses in v.17, that is significant for all saints to notice, the term in the Greek is “harpazo”. But what does “harpazo” have to do with the rapture.

Literally the word “harpazo” means to “be caught up”. The word literally means “to be “pulled up” to be “take up” and “taken away”. On another occasion, the very word “harpazo” is used, and it is precisely what happened to Paul the apostle, when he was “caught up” to the third heaven. In 2 Corinthians 12:2 I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one **caught up** to the third heaven. The very word “**caught up**” is a reference to what happened to Paul, though he didn’t want to speak of himself. While the term “rapture” is not in the Bible as that word, the wonderful truth from the heart of God is that there is going to be a day and a time when the church is “caught up”, “taken up”, “pulled up” out of this world. Paul literally declares... “I can tell you this by the word of the Lord...that we which are alive and remain on the earth shall be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and remain with him forever.” (1 Thess. 4:14-17)

“Caught away” is what happened to Philip after he had baptized the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:38-39. Imagine the scene if you can. Philip came up out of the water, and the Bible records that the Spirit “caught away” Philip. One moment Philip was there, and

the next moment, he was in a completely different location. That is precisely what will take place at the rapture. Imagine if you can, one moment in your car...the next moment "gone". One moment in bed...the next moment "gone". One moment we will be doing one thing and the next "rapture" or catching away for the church.

Not only is Paul declaring the "Rapture" but he is declaring it "by the Word of the Lord". He is given a divine directive, a divine command, and a divine commission. And in this divine directive is comfort and encouragement for all who believe in Jesus Christ, and have loved ones that have gone on to be with the Lord. Just like us, many in Paul's day were grieving and hurting over loved ones that died, but by the Word of the Lord, there is great comfort, for He which raised Jesus from the dead, will raise all the saints of all the ages at the rapture of the church.

2. THE BIBLE DECLARES AN ORDER IN AND DURING THE RAPTURE. First the Bible declares the Lord Himself will come down from heaven with a shout. It will be the Lord "Himself" that rises from His throne who steps into the atmosphere of the earth. It will be the Lord "Himself" that initiates the "Rapture", the catching away of His saints of all the ages. The sound will be like a shout with the ringing command of authority. And the Bible declares that the sound is for one type of people only "believers who have a relationship with Jesus Christ". When Jesus speaks to the dead, the Bible records that the dead get up. Jesus spoke to Lazarus and Lazarus came back from the dead. Had Jesus not spoken Lazarus name specifically, all the dead in Christ would have risen. But the Bible declares a day, when graves shall burst open and the "dead in Christ shall rise first."

Second, Jesus will speak His words of resurrection, and all the saint of all the ages, shall rise. Listen to the words of the Lord, through Paul, "and the dead in Christ shall rise first", or "the believer who are dead will be the first to rise to meet the Lord".

Imagine the tomb of every saint surrendering up the body of that precious child of God. While we may know individuals who have been dead for year, we will discover at His Word, that there will be "a resurrection". While all other unbelievers will be judged, this particular resurrection is only for the "saint of God", the born again believer. The sobering reality at this point is this. If you die apart from the Lord Jesus Christ, you will not and cannot have a part in this

resurrection, for this resurrection is for the saints...the child of God, the man of God, the woman of God, that youth that died knowing the Lord. While we grieve over our dead loved ones, there is coming a time when they WILL get up from the dead. There will come a time when all the graves of all the saints of all the ages will give up the body, and we will receive a new glorified body for all of eternity.

Third, the living generation of believers will be "caught up" to be with the Lord. One of the mysteries of the "rapture" is that there will be a generation of people living, moving, working, on this earth, with it is time for "the catching away" to take place. Imagine if that were our generation. Imagine sitting in church one minute, then standing in the presence of the Lord (faster than you can blink your eye). That is precisely what is going to happen, for we have "the Word of the Lord" on the matter.

Paul explained the "rapture" in a sequence of events. 1) The living generation shall be "caught up", meaning that the "rapture" is a planned sudden event in the economy of God. He put it this way when speaking to the saints at Corinth, "...in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall all be changed. " (1 Thes. 4:17)

It was in a split second, that Philip was caught away and found in another location. It was in a split second that Paul was "caught up" into the third heaven. It will be in a split second that "the rapture" takes place. While some may desire to "dream away" the rapture, the truth is, pictures of rapture have already taken place all through Scripture. For Scripture declares that, "Enoch was taken away so that he should not see death..." (Heb. 11:5) and "Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. (2 Kgs. 2:11).

While we cannot comprehend the rapture, the Bible declares it to be so. Consider this wonderful thought in light of the rapture, "Millions of people from all over the earth feel a tingling sensation pulsating through their bodies. They are suddenly energized. Those with physical deformities are healed. Wrinkles disappear. Those in buildings pass through the glass right through the ceiling without pain or damage. Their flesh and bones seems to dematerialize, defying all known laws of physics. As they travel heavenward, some see and greet those who have risen from their graves. After a brief reunion...they all vanish from sight." Will you be in the rapture?