

Sunday School

07/20/14 - originally preached on Sunday Night October 23, 2011

Where Did They Go

Topic – Future Events

Text – Matthew 24 - Opening Text – Matthew 24:26 - 44

For many years I have misunderstood the above verses. On the surface these verses seem to be speaking about the rapture of the church, which is an event yet in our future, when the Lord Jesus Christ will return and take His Bride (the Church) from this earth, and bring her back to Heaven with Him. Consider the following verses that refer to the rapture of the church:

"Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, **shall so come in like manner** as ye have seen him go into heaven." - (Acts 1:11)

"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. 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. And if I go and prepare a place for you, **I will come again, and receive you unto myself**; that where I am, there ye may be also." - (John 14:1-3)

"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. **For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout**, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then **we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together** with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words." - (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

"Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." - (1 Corinthians 15:50-58)

"After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, **Come up hither**, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter." - (Revelation 4:1)

Note regarding the above verse in Revelation 4 - Revelation chapter 1 deals with the Apostle John's vision of the Lord in Heaven chapters 2 & 3 are all about the Church Age. When you get to chapter 4, there is no longer a mention of the Church again. The Church (the Bride) has been brought up to Heaven ("come up hither").

Enoch and Noah –

"And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him" - (Genesis 5:24)

Enoch is a picture of the Church – “God took him” translated him – picture of the Rapture.

Noah and his family are a picture of Israel who will be saved through the tribulation; but they must go through it.

All of the above passages deal with the Rapture of the Church, but there is another wonderful picture of this event taken from the tradition of the Jewish Wedding. In Bible days when a marriage was arranged, the Groom first came to the Bride's home and paid the price for the Bride. Then the Groom would return to his father's home and prepare a home for himself and his new bride. When all of the preparations were finished, the Groom would return to pick up the Bride and take her to the new home. By the way, the Bride never knew when the Groom was going to come, so she had to be ready all the time. A celebration would take place for several days back at the Father's house, and then the whole procession would return to the Bride's parent's home. All of this is a wonderful picture of Christ coming to earth (the Bride's home), and paying for our sins. He is now back in Heaven preparing a place for us, and someday soon He will return for us and bring us to our new home in Heaven where we will celebrate for seven years (Marriage Supper of the Lamb). At the end of the seven years, we will return to the earth with the Lord.

There is a lot more that could be said about this event called the rapture, but I just wanted to briefly explain what it entails. However, the verses above from Matthew 24 do not deal with the rapture of the Church. The entire context of Matthew chapter 24 deals with the Tribulation Period. Now the Tribulation Period is what will take place on the earth after the church has been taken away via the Rapture. The purpose of the Tribulation Period is to awaken Israel from their spiritual slumber and have their eyes opened to the Truth about their Messiah. Notice Matthew 24:15:

"When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:)" - (Matthew 24:15)

This is obviously a reference to the Tribulation Period.

Now this brings us back to our original text verses at the top of the page (remember them - I know it was a long time since you looked at them). I said at the beginning of this post that for many years I was confused about these verses. On the surface they certainly seem to be talking about the rapture, meaning that the people that were taken away were raptured by the Lord to go to Heaven. However, the context simply does not support this interpretation. What then do these verses refer to, and where are these folks taken to? The answer to that question can be found in Luke 17, which is a parallel passage to Matthew 24. Notice what it says in vv 31 - 37:

"Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed. In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. Remember Lot's wife. Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it. I tell you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left. Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. And they answered and said unto him, **Where, Lord?** And he said unto them, **Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together.**" - (Luke 17:30-37)

The disciples ask the Lord where they will be taken. He tells them that they will go where the eagles (vultures) are gathered together. This is a reference to Armageddon:

"And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe. And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs." - (Revelation 14:18-20)

"And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS." - (Revelation 19:11-16)

"And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God; That ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great." - (Revelation 19:17-18)

Tribulation Verses:

Daniel 9:20 – 27; Revelation 11:2 – 3; 12:14

Anti-Christ verses:

Daniel 7:8, 24 – 26; 2 Thessalonians 2:4

I just thought that I would try to clear up a common confusion regarding these verses. I must confess that I do not understand a lot about these future events, but I think that I have the proper interpretation of these verses.

Practical Thoughts:

- 1 **Don't be Frightened** – don't let all of this talk about the end times scare you; let it fuel you to do greater things for the Lord in the time that we have left.
- 2 **Don't Fuss About It** – we are not going to agree with everybody about when the rapture is going to take place, or even the exact order of events. The main thing is that Christ is coming soon.
- 3 **Don't Forget About It** – allow this message and others like to put eternity at the forefront of your whole life. We are going home soon. Live your life today as if Christ was returning tomorrow.

Conclusion – What would you do if you found out that you had one day left to live on this earth?