

Christian Ascension: Separation from Evil

Text

1 Thess. 4:13-17 ¹³ *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.*

¹⁴ *For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.* ¹⁵ *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.*

¹⁶ *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:* ¹⁷ *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.*

Memory Verse

Luke 17:29 *But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all.*

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Introduction

What is this “Rapture” thing that people talk about?

The Bible talks about believers being “caught up” to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:17); this is what is referred to as “the rapture”.

Think about the following:

(1) What is the main confusion around the so-called “rapture”?

The concept of “the rapture” provokes much debate, particularly around timing and timelines. The Bible’s focus is simpler: Jesus comes, we meet Him, and evil gets separated from us for good.

(2) Noah’s ark and us.

When the flood came, water lifted Noah and his family up and away from the wicked world below (Luke 17:26). That is a picture of how Jesus will lift believers up before judgment falls.

(3) Why “a thousand years” is not a stopwatch.

In the Bible, “a thousand years” often means a complete, perfect period of time, not 1000 on a

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calendar (2 Pet. 3:8, Ps. 90:4). It is God's way of saying "enough time to finish the job".

(3) When will God wipe the earth clean?

Not until after Jesus returns, judges, and makes all things new (2 Pet. 3:10-13, Rev. 21:1).

Objectives

To see that our being "caught up" is the final separation Jesus talked about.

To understand that the timing is God's perfect time to separate us from evil completely.

To understand that this is also when God commissions the homes Jesus has prepared for us (John 14:2-3).

Presentation

1. Our Being Lifted Up Is The Separation Jesus Predicted

(1) When Jesus returns, He will separate everything that causes people to stumble and sin (Matt. 13:41-43, Matt. 25:31-46).

(2) The flood in Noah's time is a model: water lifted the righteous up, then destroyed the wicked

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below, and later the earth started afresh (Luke 17:26-27).

(3) We are waiting for that same pattern again, but this time by fire, both actual (2 Pet. 3:10) and spiritual (the “law from Zion” (Isa. 2:3), Jesus’s Word, the refiner’s fire (Mal. 3:3)). God will destroy all evil, then make a new heaven and new earth where only righteousness lives (2 Pet. 3:13, Rev. 21:1-4).

2. Jesus Changes Us, Then We Are With Him Forever

(1) The change is instant.

“In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye... we shall be changed.” (1 Cor. 15:52)

That is what people mean by “the rapture” - the moment we are “caught up” (1 Thess. 4:17).

As with the flicking of a light switch, our old body will be transformed into a new body (Luke 24:39). Corruptible will be replaced with incorruptible (1 Cor. 15:53). No time. No waiting.

(2) What happens after the change, we do not measure.

The Bible says “we shall forever be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:17).

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(3) The goal is separation from evil.

Rev. 21:4 *And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.*

3. Our Ascension Opens the Way for Our New Homes

(1) After the old, corrupt world system has been destroyed, we shall be in the homes that Jesus has prepared for us (John 14:1-3, 2 Pet. 3:10-13).

(2) Heaven is not far away in a “place” sense. It is about being in God’s presence, the “home of righteousness” (2 Pet. 3:13).

(3) That is when our hope becomes real - we move back into what God intended from the start: Eden restored, the Paradise of God (Rev. 2:7, Rev. 22:1-5).

Evaluation Questions & Answers

1. What is the confusion around the so-called “rapture” in Christendom?
 - * The “rapture” is a hotly debated subject, in particular with debates about timing in reference to “the tribulation”, the time of Jacob’s trouble (Jer. 30:7). The debates centre around whether “the rapture” will be ‘pre-trib’, ‘mid-trib’ or ‘post-trib’.
 - * But the Bible word is “caught up” (1 Thess. 4:17). The focus is on meeting Jesus and being separated from evil, and not on building a timeline.
2. What is the relationship between Noah’s ark being lifted by water and believers being lifted to meet Christ?
 - * Both are about God lifting the righteous out before judgment falls. Noah’s family was lifted by water and saved from the flood. Believers will be lifted up to meet Christ in the air and saved from the final judgment by fire (Luke 17:26-30, 1 Thess. 4:16-17).

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3. What do we know for sure about the timing of being “caught up”?
 - * That it will be instantaneous (1 Cor. 15:52) and that we will be with the Lord forever (1 Thess. 4:17).
 - * We do not know the “day or the hour” of “that day”. Matt. 24:36 says that only the Father knows. So we shall not guess, we shall just be ready.
4. After God created the earth, when did He say that He would evacuate everyone, destroy it, and leave it desolate like Sodom and Gomorrah?
 - * There is nowhere that God has said that He would destroy the earth under Jesus and leave it as Sodom and Gomorrah. He has said that Jesus will return, judge, and all things will be made new (2 Pet. 3:10-13, Rev. 20:11-15, Rev. 21:1). The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, described in the Book of Genesis, happened relatively early on after Creation, and serves us a warning to us, a picture of that final judgment (Luke 17:28-30).

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You that You are coming back to take us to Yourself. Help me live ready, with my eyes on You and my heart free from the things of this world. Keep me faithful until that day when You separate us from all evil and bring us into the home You prepared. Make me ready for Your coming. Amen.