

Melva's Corner

From Glory To Glory

April 25, 2005

Bible Text: John 14:1-3 I Corinthians 15:51-53 Rev. 19:11-16

Central Truth: "And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."

This subject has been on my heart all week and I must share it with you. Somehow when we study prophecy in the Church, we seem to focus most of our attention on the future of the unbelievers. The oncoming Tribulation Period, the actions of the Antichrist, and Armageddon are explained over and over again as if they were the main concerns of the believing Church.

Don't get me wrong, these subjects should be taught. But there is a much more positive subject and of much greater concern to believers. It is the subject that is often overlooked when an "End Time" message is preached. As believers we should be looking at the future of those who will go to Heaven during the Tribulation Period and then return with the Lord to populate His Kingdom on earth. After all, the primary difference between biblical faith and worldly religions is that with Christ we have a bright future. **What we see is not all we get.** We started living our eternal lives from the day we were saved and it is only the beginning. The best is yet to come.

So let's look beyond - beginning with the Rapture of the Church and see what will happen to each one of us who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and helped carry His cross in this life.

THE RAPTURE

The two questions that come up about the Rapture of the Church are (1) What is it? and (2) When is it?

As to question one, the Rapture of the Church describes the moment when the Lord will come and take the believers with Him

to Heaven. This is the great promise of Christianity and the great difference between that of biblical faith and the common worldly religions we spoke of earlier. Buddha will not be making another appearance, and Mohammed's second show has been cancelled. The various cults that come and go normally last only for a season, sometimes only as long as their original founder exists on the earth. But the followers of Christ rest assured of a great deliverance to come, a true deliverance of the Chosen People to the Promised Land.

It is sad that there are Christian churches who have not disclosed the doctrine of the Rapture of the Church to their members. The churches who have put the Bible away have thus lost the primary promise of Jesus Christ; instead they have created a meaningless and powerless copy of what they think life in Christ is like. The believers who understand the Rapture and await the coming of the King, on the other hand, live in a steady hope and a powerful faith based on the reality of a New Kingdom with ongoing eternal life.

The word Rapture is borrowed from the Latin Vulgate Bible, and appears in the English Bible as "caught up" in I Thess. 4:17. The final three verses of I Thess. 4 contain the promise of the return of the Lord for the Church:

“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 (I Thess. 4:16-18).

Verse 18 is not quoted as much as the others, but it certainly should be. What is more comforting than to think that we will go beyond this life and then "ever be with the Lord"?

The Lord first indicated that He would be departing from the Church and returning again on His final Passover night. In that nerve-racking scene in the upper room He gave His disciples this momentous message:

“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)

After His resurrection and the following forty days with the disciples, He taught them "the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3). The Lord then rose to His Father, and the promise of His return was repeated:

“And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel:

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 1:9-11)

It is interesting that the Lord, having only forty days left with the Church, thought to teach them not so much how to behave but the things of the Kingdom to come. His final messages were about the Kingdom and about witnessing to all men. **His final words on earth were:**

“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

The two men in white apparel were angels, of course, who had come to reassure the disciples that in just the manner they had seen the Lord ascend — that is upwards toward Heaven — He would return. They would someday see Him come back from the clouds of Heaven.

Thus the Lord is not to return "in a spiritual way" or "within your human heart" but literally in the manner that He left. Precisely, He will descend from Heaven. In that the Lord thought to spend His last moments on earth explaining the things of the Kingdom to the

Church, we should in like manner concentrate on the positive message of the Kingdom to come. This is my reason for writing this message. The Rapture is only the beginning. We gain additional information about the Rapture from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians:

“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.” (I Corinthians 15:22-23).

The Scripture says that every man born of Adam, every human being, dies, but those in Christ will be resurrected. It also indicates that we have an order ("every man in his own order"). This ties in with "the dead in Christ will rise first." Jesus is called the first fruits since He is the first man permanently resurrected. First fruits is the proper name of the third Jewish feast, Resurrection Sunday, which we have come to call Easter. If we refer to it as First Fruits then we realize that there is a second, a third, and so on. In point of fact, we all have a number, and we will rise in that order in the Rapture of the Church. The dead in Christ will rise first. Jesus' number was one. Let us hope that by the time of the arrival of the Lord the numbers will go into the billions!

The most interesting facet of the Rapture of the Church is that each believer will undergo a mysterious metamorphosis; we will be changed in a way that will outfit us for eternal life. The bodies we have now are not equipped for the eternity we will experience.

“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.” (I Corinthians 15:51-53)

Death is a common fear of a lot of mortal beings, there are so many human being living in fear of it — except the true believer. Paul exults in the face of death:

“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.” (I Cor. 15:55-57).

Once the Rapture of the Church is accomplished, then we are ready for the exciting events of our seven years in Heaven while the Tribulation Period takes place on earth.

IN HEAVEN

Once the believers arrive in Heaven with the Lord, we have important matters to transact. We are not issued wings and harps, but instead we have a serious conference with the Lord, aimed at preparing us for our wedding. In this life we are considered the Bride of Christ; in Heaven, we shall become the wife of the Lord.

The first event is a kind of review of our life of service for the Lord while on earth:

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or for bad.” (II Cor. 5:10)

It would appear that each of us meets with the Lord at this "judgment seat" in order to evaluate with Him our lives on earth. The emphasis is not on our sins, which were forgiven long ago at the cross, but on our works. The believer is saved "unto good works" and has a responsibility as a disciple of Christ. We were appointed to certain tasks on earth — as workers in the field, soldiers in the spiritual battle, and so on — otherwise we could all have gone to heaven the moment we were saved. So this is our evaluation day, determining if we have accomplished, or failed to accomplish, certain assignments given us according to our faithfulness.

Paul expounds quite specifically on the standards in the judgment seat of Christ, and how our works are to be reckoned:

“For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.” (I Cor. 3:11-13).

Paul first establishes that no foundation for this life can be laid

outside of that in Jesus Christ. Good works done outside of Christ - those done by unbelievers - are not a part of this Scripture, because the unbelievers will not be in Heaven. What good works, and sins, the unbelievers accumulate in this life will be presented at the Great White Throne of Judgment.

After Paul establishes that the believer has laid his foundation in Christ, he now divides the work into two categories, calling them "gold, silver, and precious stones," on the one hand, and "wood, hay and stubble," on the other. Obviously, those are two very different rankings of quality. The Lord will try all of our works with fire.

The image is very clear, since fire will certainly show the difference between the gold, silver, and precious stones works and those of wood, hay and stubble. The precious metals and stones would not be harmed by fire, but the wood, hay and stubble will all be burned away, and that is the purpose of the judgment seat.

Paul now specifies that we shall be rewarded for the works that survive the fire:

"If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward." (I Cor. 3:14).

We shall receive jewels for our crowns for the good works we have done in this life.

Paul also specifies that we shall suffer loss for the works that do not qualify — the wood, hay and stubble:

"If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire." (I Cor. 3:15).

We must notice in the passage the phrase "but he himself shall be saved." God is very clear on the point that salvation is a free gift, not an earned prize. We cannot lose our salvation by bad works, and certainly not by sins, which were forgiven the moment we decided to believe in Jesus Christ. We shall suffer loss of our rewards for our bad works, but we will not fall out of Heaven as a result.

The fire is not meant to consume the believer. God has fire that does not consume, such as with the burning bush and the lake of fire. The fire is only to purify away the bad works, as fire sterilizes away bacteria from foods. The sense of the judgment seat of Christ is to prepare us as a spotless bride for the Lord (II Cor. 11:2). If we were to go to our wedding with the Lord with the consciousness that our sins are forgiven, but with the memory of bad works we would have a guilty conscience, and we would not be the pure virgins the Lord wishes as His bride. Thus, the Judgment Seat of Christ is the final preparation for the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. Just as an earthly bride adorns herself in her finest garments, so we will go before the Lord cleansed of all bad works, forgiven of all sins, and in effect, as perfect as He is Himself.

It sometimes surprises many believers that we will indeed be the equal of Christ in purity, in the future. But this is our destiny; the Scripture is very clear. Christ could not marry less of a bride than He Himself is, because we shall reign with Him in the Kingdom as Queen.

This is true Christianity, a transcendence of this worldly life, this worldly state, this worldly body, this worldly mind and this worldly labor — we trade it all for a state of eternal bliss in the presence of God Himself in Christ Jesus.

Now we are ready to marry the Lord. It is fascinating to compare the events in Heaven with the wedding tradition of Israel in the time of Christ. There was a seven day "honeymoon" in the bridal chamber for the bride and groom, preceding the reception or marriage supper. This coincides exactly with the seven years in Heaven and the Judgment Seat of Christ, leading up to the marriage with Him.

John covers the marriage scene for us in two glorious verses in his Revelation of Jesus Christ:

“Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.” (Rev. 19:7-8).

The white linen costumes, or bridal gowns, that we shall wear

when we marry the Lamb fulfill a fascinating Bible “type” that reaches back to the Tabernacle of ancient Israel (Exodus 25-30). In the Tabernacle, plain white linen was associated with pure righteousness. The linen curtains around the entire Tabernacle, the tent, as it were, were pure white. No one could enter through the sides or the rear because they would have to have been perfectly righteous to pass through the white linen. The door of the Tabernacle, however, was sewn with the colors of Christ — scarlet, purple and blue threads, indicating sacrifice, royalty and Heaven. All the Israelites had to enter by the door and the implication was that they were entering by means of the Messiah. Jesus said, **"I am the door: by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture" (John 10:9).**

But now, the Church shall wear white! "Fine linen, clean and white, for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints." The very fact that we can now appear in white — glowing white, as did Christ after His resurrection — testifies to our final perfection.

When our marriage to the Lord is accomplished in Heaven we will be ready to immediately return to earth with Him to occupy His Kingdom. This is exactly the manner in which, in the Israeli wedding, the bride returned with her bridegroom after the marriage to housing he had arranged for them. They did not remain in his father's house but instead departed for their own abode.

THE RETURN

The return of the Lord to the earth is given in glorious terms in the Scriptures. John's writing is breathtaking:

“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 his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.” (Rev. 19:11-16)

In verse 14 we temporarily come as an army in order to put a stop to the battle of Armageddon, which will be in full progress on earth at the moment we return.

Once Armageddon is taken care of, we shall see the judgment of those who lived during the Tribulation Period, and the rewarding of those who refused to receive the mark of the Antichrist, but instead were martyred for their faith in Jesus Christ:

“And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the Word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon, their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.” (Rev. 20:4)

The unbelievers, however, will be bound 1,000 years, until the final judgment:

“But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.” (Rev. 20:5)

John rejoices over the fact that we are blessed to take part in this first resurrection and to reign with Christ through the Kingdom Age:

“Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they, shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.” (Rev. 20:6)

More details were given by the Lord during His earthly ministry about this judgment, which serves as an immigration office into

the Kingdom. He means to take care of every single soul who existed during the seven years on earth, when the Tribulation Period was in progress. The Lord is so perfectly fair. All of the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate the believers from the unbelievers "as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats":

“When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom, prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” (Matt. 25:31-34)

In reply, the believers with Christ will express surprise that they had so honored the Lord during the Tribulation Period, but He will make the matter very clear to them:

“And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”(Matt: 25-40)

If the people of the nations of the world, even during the Tribulation Period, demonstrate faith in Christ by caring for his brethren (the 144,000 of Israel who will witness during those hard time), they will be saved. But the judgment is equal and devastating upon those who failed to honor the Lord during the reign of the Antichrist:

“Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.” (Matt. 25:45-46).

The Old Testament saints will be regathered as well at the beginning of the Kingdom Age. So the Kingdom will get under way with a rather mixed crowd, all having in common a sincere belief in the Messiah and King. There will be the faithful of the Old Testament, who waited so long for this grand age, the believers of the Church Age, who went to Heaven in the Rapture, and finally the believers of the Tribulation Period, who will enter the Kingdom in their natural bodies. Since the Tribulation saints did not believe before the Rapture, they were not changed and they remain as they are, still marrying and given in marriage, unlike the believers

of the Church Age. This latter group, the people in their natural bodies, will give birth during the Kingdom to ordinary, fleshly sinners, again "born of Adam." It is these few on earth, who will occasionally disobey the Lord's commands and make it necessary for Him to set penalties for failures of worship or sanctity (e.g. Zech. 14:16-19).

These mischief makers in the Kingdom, having multiplied, will be rallied by satan in the very last battle at the end of the thousand years:

“And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison. And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them” (Rev. 20:7-9)

This last rebellion of satan is unsuccessful and the Great White Throne of Judgment will be held for all those who were confined with him, and the unbelievers of all ages:

“And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.

And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.

And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.” (Rev. 20:11-15)

This second death, then, is that which is avoided by the believers in Christ.

THE KINGDOM

There are a thousand great years between our return from Heaven with the Lord and that throne of judgment for the unbelievers. And this Kingdom Age, this great millennium, is the true reward of the Church. We should go back and examine it more closely.

The Kingdom will be quite a different place than we know now. Things will be socially "upside down". It will be socially acceptable to be a Christian then, and downright foolish to be an unbeliever. The King Himself shall reign in Jerusalem with us, the Queen.

We must turn to the Old Testament for knowledge of the Kingdom, since that's where Jesus got His teaching. Remember, there was no New Testament at the time the Lord taught the disciples "the things pertaining to the Kingdom." But the great passages of Isaiah and the other prophets make clear this magnificent age of God's triumph. The New Testament assumed that everyone understood the Kingdom, since it had been already explained in the Old, so it virtually began with the Sermon on the Mount — the explanation of how one gets into the Kingdom and how the laws of the Kingdom will be administered. The Beatitudes (Matt. 5, etc.) continue to inspire us as to that idyllic age of God's total sovereignty over the earth.

Isaiah's passages ring with beauty:

“But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.

And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.

The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.

And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the

weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den.

They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:4-9)

Nowhere in the Bible is the Kingdom more concisely and more beautifully described than in Isaiah's very brief Chapter 12. Let me quote it in its entirety:

“And in that day thou shalt say, Oh Lord, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me.

Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation.

Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation. And in that day shall ye say, Praise the Lord, call upon his name, declare his doings among the people, make mention that his name is exalted.

Sing unto the Lord; for he hath done excellent things: this is known in all the earth.

Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion: for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee.”

ETERNITY

Isaiah 9:6-7 will be fully realized (“Unto us a child is born ...”). After the Kingdom and the White Throne of Judgment, we are still not finished. The believers go on into the mysterious period known as eternity, the Scriptures are very cryptic on this time frame. God is going to change Heaven, earth and Jerusalem — there will be no more seas. However, we shall continue to live - on with the Lord in eternity under those strange new circumstances.

The biblical writing becomes symbolic at the very end of the Scriptures as John describes his Revelation. We can sample the description of eternity as John saw it and wrote it for us in Revelation 21:

“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.

And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.

He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.” (Rev. 21:1-7)

One notable feature is that eternity will not have a Temple:

“And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.” (Rev. 21:22).

We might surmise that no Temple is needed because God and the Lamb are the Temple and we exist through, in and around them. Our worship will then be complete in them. Everyone who then exists will truly be one with God.

Another interesting feature is that there will be a new kind of light. Light was virtually the first thing God made in creation, but now there will be no further need for the sun nor the moon because God and the Lamb provide all the light:

“And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.” (Rev. 21:23).

The most striking feature of eternity is that there will be not even a whisper of evil about it. While there was a certain amount of rebellion in the Kingdom, as we saw earlier, eternity will be utterly free of "anything that defileth":

“And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it.

And there shall be in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's; book of life.” (Rev. 21:26-27)

And remember, this is only the beginning! John, after seeing all these things, made the most logical conclusion, and one that all Christians might make. The thing to do, he felt, was to pray immediately for the soon coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. John the Apostle, a New Testament saint, a member of the Church, awaited the Rapture fervently — as fervently as we ought to. The conclusion of the Bible is more than a fitting conclusion for this discussion. John's final prayer must be our ultimate prayer. In view of all he had seen in this stunning Revelation of Jesus Christ, John uttered simply:

“He which testifieth these things saith, Surely come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.” (Rev. 22:20-21)

Shouldn't this be the message we preach to unbeliever. The message that there is a blessed hope awaiting all who believe. Hallelujah!

Memory Text:

“Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.” (I Cor. 2: 9)