

**Volume 5:
The Believing Will
Be Leaving! (Part 1)**



*Things to Come
and Why They Matter*
An Introductory Study in Prophecy

Prophecy Series Sermons

Our sermon series for the summer of 2014 investigated the subject of prophecy. The response by the congregation at Vistoso Community Church was so encouraging, that we are publishing each of the sermons both in booklet form and online on our web site.

These first five sermons are being released in booklet form together with the final five sermons in the series to be added in 2015:

- Volume 1: Two Kinds of Wisdom
- Volume 2: The Kingdom Is Coming
- Volume 3: The Second Coming of Christ
- Volume 4: The Tribulation
- **Volume 5: The Believing Will Be Leaving, Part 1**



In His grace,

Kevin Redig, Pastor
Vistoso Community Church

Volume 5: The Believing Will Be Leaving!

The title of this lesson sounds intriguing doesn't it: *The Believing Will be Leaving!* It caught my attention in an excellent book on the end times written by Mark Hitchcock called, *The End*. In borrowing it, I have modified it somewhat, but wish to give him the credit.

Perhaps you are thinking, "Yes of course! Some fatal illness, sudden accident, and of course old-age catches up with us all!" True—but that is not what this title is addressing. Some day, perhaps soon, the *Believing*, those who have exercised faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ, will be leaving—and they will be doing so all at the same time! Actually, they will be leaving with all those who, through faith in the person and work of Christ, have been part of the body of Jesus Christ since the day of Pentecost almost 2000 years ago. Imagine such a thing—all those who responded to Peter's powerful sermon right after Pentecost; down through the centuries of the Church; right up until the trumpet sounds. A great throng, all leaving at the same time.

Beware of Doubters

I can see some of you thinking right now, "Don't tell me this is going to be a lesson on that rapture thing?" What rapture thing? "You know, that crazy idea some Christians have. . ."

"The Rapture idea is ridiculous...One has to conclude that the secret rapture theory may be evangelical, but is nonetheless unbiblical. It is a grotesque idea—the rapture may be a most agreeable doctrine for cowards, but it is nothing better than wishful thinking and must be relegated to the area of myth and fantasy."

(G. Coates)

Oh no! I am not talking about any unBiblical idea, nor am I talking about a secret theory of some kind. I can assure you, my title for today is solidly grounded in the Scriptures, like always. And that means it is something that God has chosen to reveal to His disciples. I tell you this because, the disdain of Dr. Coates notwithstanding, what really matters is what God has revealed to us in His Word. Thus, let me develop for you what might be called the *great snatch* by the hand of God!

Once again, I know what you are thinking, “I have at least heard of this crazy rapture idea, but what is this *snatch* you are talking about?” Be patient, and I will unfold it for you. Let me share with you an interview I recently watched given by an individual considered to be one of the world’s foremost theologians, at least he was introduced that way. Here are excerpts, both paraphrases and quotes, from a somewhat lengthy interview:

The rapture is a myth. Furthermore, we have the wrong idea about heaven. We have been led to believe falsely. . . that we should live with a view toward heaven; and that somehow this earth is not our home.

“If we live that way, we will forget about this earth.

What about social justice, what about the problem of AIDS and what about taking care of our planet. . .”

God needs something to renew and restore and so we have got to provide it for Him. And my daily work is with desperately needy people. . . if I thought all they needed was a change in eternal destiny. . . .then I might teach that way.

(Implying, of course, that he does not teach eternity as more important than the here and now!)

Are your antennae quivering? Mine certainly are! I hope you haven’t just said—”If one of the world’s foremost theologians says it, then it must be true.”

Answers from the Scriptures

Now before I get into this, let's just acknowledge, that in contrast to the *expert* giving that interview, I am one of the world's least consequential theologians. But foremost for us must be, what is always the issue before us, what does the Word of God have to say? For the Word of God is our standard, our anchor, our reference point—for it is the Mind of Christ!



God's Instructions to Us. Think about this—there are two things God has exalted above everything else—His Word and His name (reputation). (Psalm 138:2) If this is how God feels about His revelation to man, before we take a position on any area of our spiritual lives, we need to see what the Word of God has to say about it. So let's use it to critique the words of one of the world's "*foremost theologians.*"

He says we have been led to believe, falsely . . . that we should live with a view toward heaven:

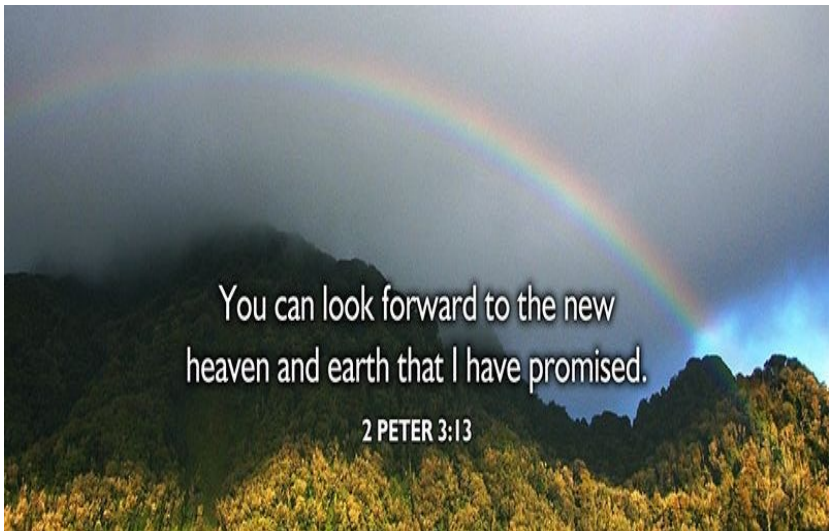
Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. . . Matthew 6:33

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven. . . for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Matthew 6:19-21

. . . begotten into a living hope through the resurrection of the dead to an inheritance incorruptible. . . reserved in heaven for you. . . 1 Peter 1:3-4

This expert also labeled as false the idea that somehow this earth is not our home.

. . . confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on this earth...desiring a better heavenly country. . . Hebrews 11:13,16



Do you see that the theology this *expert* is pressing us to accept is in direct contradiction with Scripture? Furthermore, what he says we have been led to falsely believe—appears to be **exactly** what the Scriptures teach us to believe!

This man is by definition a heretic! Maybe I am being too hard on him—let's keep going. He encourages us to take good enough care of this earth, so that God has something to work with in the future, and to focus upon the needs of people now. But, what does the Word of God have to say? The heavens are going to be destroyed with fire (2 Peter 3); we are to give thanks to the Father because He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness (Colossians 1).

God doesn't need anything to work with in order to fulfill His future plans of a new heaven and a new earth. In fact, He is going to destroy what is here now! Furthermore, what really matters for each member of the human race is whether or not they have been rescued from Satan's domain!

For a theologian, this man has a small god and no understanding of sin. So when this man says the rapture is a myth, perhaps you can see why I don't feel the need to immediately jump on his bandwagon. When so-called theologians ridicule any concept, I question their expertise when in their list of supposedly correct theology are items grossly in conflict with what the Bible clearly has to say. I have to ask myself, "Do those who tell us what we should believe—so-called experts, seminary professors, television personalities—do they have even the slightest understanding of the most basic rudiments of Biblical theology?"

You and I must be very careful, and question the validity of everything we hear—lest we get drawn into the wisdom of this world rather than the truth as revealed by God. Let me state this another way—if our *foremost* theologian is clearly and demonstrably wrong about every other pronouncement that comes out of his mouth, maybe he is just as wrong about his dismissal of something he calls the rapture!

Again, the key issue for us is always what the Bible has to say! Now why do you think I have so painstakingly belabored this point? Because I know that in the face of so much ridicule, some of you have begun to doubt truths you once held dear. For others, what we are going to cover is going to be brand new, and is going to seem too fantastic to believe.

All Scripture is God-breathed
and is useful for teaching, rebuking,
correcting and training
in righteousness ...

II Timothy 3:16



My request, just look for yourself and see what the Scriptures have to say, and then make up your mind. I think you might be amazed if you do.

Our Division of Labor. It might help us in our investigation, to refresh our memories on the division of labor that you and I share with respect to teacher/student. My calling is the same as the charge Paul gave to his protégé, Timothy:

“ . . . study to present yourself to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth.”
2 Timothy 2:15

Furthermore, I am charged:

“ . . . before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing. . . preach the Word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort. . . ”
2 Timothy 4:1-2

On the other hand, your calling, is to endure sound doctrine—even if it is difficult or overthrows preconceived ideas. Your calling is to follow the example of the Berean church:

Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.
Acts 17:11

And think about how compelling is this statement made by God in the 66th chapter of Isaiah:

“This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at My Word.”
Isaiah 66:2

The Theology of the Rapture

With the above in mind, let me start by showing you the theology of *snatching* or *seizing*.

In The Old Testament. Just prior to the Noahic Flood, Enoch left this world in a remarkable way.

And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him. Genesis 5:24

The word translated “took” means: to take, lay hold of, seize, or snatch away. So too did Elijah leave this world in a remarkable way:

And it came to pass, as the Lord was about to take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind. . . 2 Kings 2:11

And of course right after this verse a chariot of fire came to “take up” or “snatch away” Elijah.



In the New Testament. Now in the New Testament this concept is even more direct. Let me introduce you to a Greek word, a verb, that in English would be transliterated as *harpadzo*. It means: to seize, to carry off by force, to snatch out. It is a word that has vigor associated with it—if a child were to head out into the street, he would be “snatched” to safety by a watching parent. Let’s see how this word is used in Scripture.

Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more. Acts 8:39

You can probably tell that the verb *harpadzo* has been translated “caught away” in this passage. And, in fact in the text it tells us that Phillip was deposited at Azotus, which was about 20 miles away.

And this is not the only use of the word in the Bible. Revelation 12:5 tells us that Jesus was actually *snatched away* to heaven during the ascension described in Acts 1:8-f. Paul was *snatched away* to heaven and returned in II Corinthians 12:2-f. I mention all of these examples because I want you to realize that God has, on a number of occasions, seized hold of one of His children. God has literally snatched them out of one place and put them somewhere else. In all, there are actually seven *snatches* in the Bible.

Now you might be wondering: “Is he talking about seven *raptures* or something else?” I am trying to avoid all of the baggage accompanying the term *rapture* in order to just look at the text of the Bible and give you the best meaning of a word *harpadzo*, which is used multiple times in the Scriptures. Humor me for a little while longer and let’s continue to consider the idea of Divine *snatchings* of one sort or another.

Three Primary Scriptures

What I want to do next is to walk you through the three primary Scriptures that deal with what has become a myth to some, so divisive to others that they will not even talk about it, and unfortunately an obsession to yet a third group.

John 14:1-3. As we always do, let's see what the Bible has to say.

“Let not your heart be troubled; you 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 to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”

John 14:1-3

This is a very familiar passage—and yet have you actually discerned what it is saying? Did His disciples?

You see these very same disciples were waiting for a Messiah who would reign on earth—they asked Jesus about this many times (for example Matthew 24). Yet, in this passage, He is in essence saying, “I am leaving, I will prepare a place for you, and then I will come back to get you and take you to the place I have prepared that you might be with me.”



Do you see how this doesn't fit with the promise of Christ's Second Coming?

In fact, it is actually in tension with it? Let's investigate this further.

I Thessalonians 4:13-18. Consider the following somewhat lengthy passage from 1 Thessalonians:

But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Let me break this Scripture passage down into manageable pieces:

- **Those who have died.** The passage starts with a reference to those church-age believers who have died—there is something special we should know about them. *“The dead in Christ will rise first.”* But to what dead does the passage refer? It is definitely those who have died during the time of the Church!

For the Old Testament saints have a resurrection of their own as described in Daniel 12. And, the resurrection for those who are saved during the Tribulation is described in Revelation 20. This passage definitely refers to the Church-age saints who will rise first.

- **The coming of the Lord.** It goes on to refer to “*the coming of the Lord.*” Now, is this the coming of the Lord to establish His earthly reign, or the coming of the Lord to take His followers, His bride, to be with Him where He is? The answer is right here in the text. There’s our word, harpadzo, translated *caught up*. Those believers who are alive when Christ returns are going to be *snatched* right off the face of the earth and up to meet the Lord in air—that “*where He is they may be also.*”
- **Always with the Lord.** Now, notice it says that we shall thus “*always be with the Lord.*” Are you putting this together? If He comes to snatch away the Church, and we are going to “always be with Him,” then what should we expect when He does return to this earth to reign? Why, of course, we would expect to return with Him—and that is exactly what is described in Revelation 19—an army in white that consists of saints and angels. What saints—those He snatched away to be with Him forever.



Finally, what might make this a comfort to all who understood it? The answer is that they are going to be reunited with other believers of the Church-age, and they are not going to have to go through the coming Tribulation!

I Corinthians 15:50-57. One more passage for you to consider:

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell 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 trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will 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 has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "*Death is swallowed up in victory.*" "*O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?*" The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 15:50-57

Do you once again clearly see the concept of resurrection? (Neither flesh and blood or what is corrupt can inherit the Kingdom of God—only the incorrupt and a spiritual body.) We are not all going to die! How can that be? Those who are alive at the time Jesus comes to snatch away the Church will not die. But both dead and alive alike will be changed, that is, they will receive a resurrection body. The dead will rise first, incorruptible in their new bodies, and then those who are living will be changed and joined with them.

Once we have our resurrection bodies, death will indeed have been swallowed up in victory. Death will have no more sting and cause no more fear. The old order of things will have passed away. Praise God for His marvelous work and plan!

So What Does All of This Mean?

So are we talking about being snatched or the rapture? Yes! Those *caught up* to be with the Lord are indeed *snatched away* from this earth in perfect accord with our Greek word harpadzo.

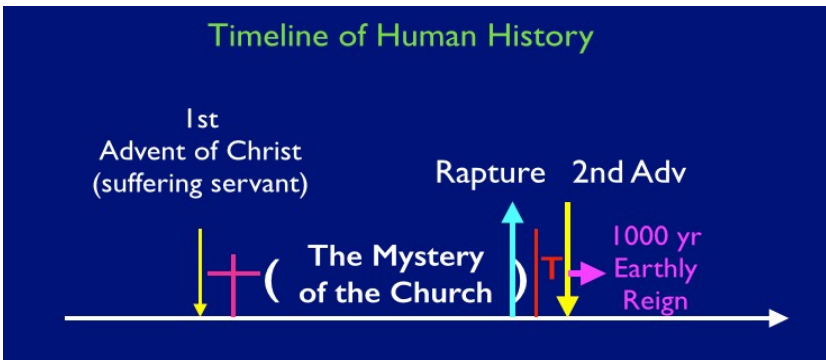
Word Usage. However, if you were down in Mexico and got snatched. . . the connotation is immediately negative. Early translators of the Bible into Latin were thinking along the same lines and wanted to give the word harpadzo a good and joyful connotation so they choose the Latin word raptio, which was then transliterated into the English word rapture. It has the idea of to be carried away in rapt delight—a pretty good understanding of what many will experience when they are snatched away to the Lord, but not a particularly good translation of harpadzo.

So for the sake of convention, we will work with the term rapture from now on, but don't let anyone tell you it is not found in the Bible. The snatching away of the saints at a specific period of time is a clear, well-developed Biblical concept that has been slightly obscured by changes in language over time.

Rapture Timing. We undoubtedly have many questions about the timing of the Rapture. We know that only God knows when it is going to happen? But, we also ask: When it does happen, is it at the start of the Tribulation? The answer to that question is yes and no.



Take another look at our diagram.



According to the 9th chapter of Daniel, the Tribulation actually starts with the signing of the peace treaty between the Jews and a world leader. My suggestion, which I think you will find very helpful, is to think of the Rapture more as the end of the time of the Church than the start of the Tribulation. You can see that I have pictured it that way in our diagram.

The Church was inserted by God into history, like a parenthesis. The Church is that great mystery that was hidden during the Old Testament, but then revealed following the First Advent of Christ.

This insertion, or parenthesis, is closed with the physical removal of the Church from this earth. Follow the flow of God's plan:

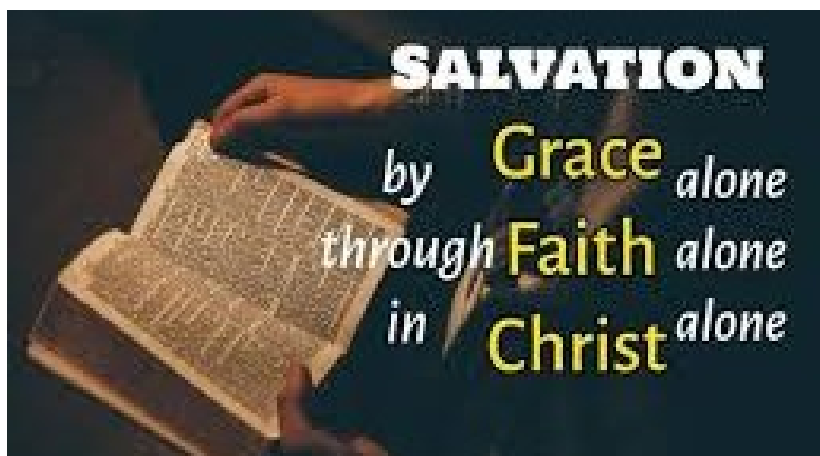
- How did the Church start? Suddenly and supernaturally—at Pentecost via the coming of the Holy Spirit!
- How is it going to end? The same way! Suddenly, in the blink of an eye, and supernaturally.

Do you see, both the beginning and close of the Church, are like two bookends that supernaturally bound the work that Christ has done through His Body on earth.

Perhaps you are thinking, “Why does God close out the Church this way? It is such a difficult idea to get a hold of.” Good question—hold that thought and we will cover some of the reasons why in our second lesson on the Rapture. How about if we summarize all of this—in order?

- The Rapture involves those who believed during the Church age. It happens suddenly, without fanfare.
- Those who have died, from Pentecost on, will be resurrected first—their souls and spirits will be reunited with a new body.
- An instant behind, those believers who are still alive will have their bodies transformed apart from ever physically dying.

The thing to remember here is that the passages we looked at talk about the dead (and living) “in Christ” which is not descriptive of Old Testament saints—just those who come to faith during the time of the Church.



The Rapture is Not the Second Coming

Perhaps you are asking, “Are you sure this isn’t just the Second Coming?” This is a very good question, the answer to which needs to be very clear in your mind.

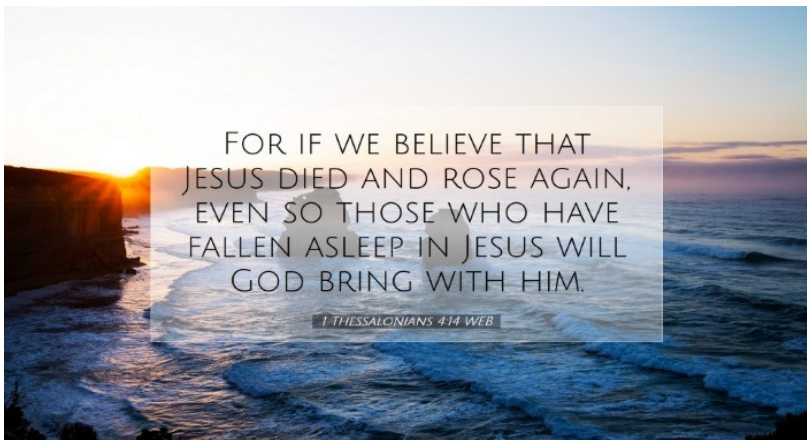
When we studied the Second Coming, you should recall that the coming of Christ was visible to a watching world, elicited a great response, and started a whole chain of events. Is it possible for the Rapture to fit into this sequence of events, or is it describing something completely different?

I think you will find the table below very helpful in identifying the scriptural differences that can be explained by our understanding of the Rapture versus the Second Coming.

<u>Rapture</u>	<u>Second Coming</u>
Christ comes in the air (1Thessalonians 4:16-17)	Christ comes to the earth (Zechariah 14:4)
Christ comes <u>for</u> His saints (1Thessalonians 4:16-17)	Christ comes <u>with</u> His saints (Revelation 19:4)
Believers depart the earth (John 14:1-3)	Unbelievers are taken away (Matthew 24:37-41)
No signs precede—it is imminent	Many signs precede (Matthew 24:4-29)
Will occur in a moment—a blink (1 Corinthians 15:51-52)	Will be visible to the entire world (Revelation 1:7)
Tribulation follows	Millennial Kingdom follows

As you study the chart on the previous page, you should be reaching the same conclusion that many theologians have over the years. Consider two examples:

- These “contrasts should make it evident that the translation of the Church is an event quite different in character and time from the return of the Lord to establish His Kingdom, and confirms the conclusion that the translation takes place before the tribulation.”
(J. Walvoord)
- “Scripture suggests that the Second Coming occurs in two stages—first the Rapture, when He comes for His saints and they are caught up to meet Him in the air (1 Thessalonian 4:14-17), and second, His return to earth, when he comes with His saints (Jude 1:14) to execute judgment on His enemies. Daniel’s 70th week must fall between those two events. That is the only scenario that reconciles the imminency of Christ’s coming for His saints with the yet unfilled signs that signal His final glorious return with the saints.”
(J. MacArthur)



In Closing

Let me give you two things to think about in closing. First, there are many things that bring a sense of urgency to our lives. Turning the corner in a business venture so that it becomes profitable; the deciding basket in a pick-up game of basketball; some issue with our children; or the final push to get ready just before a big trip. It becomes easy for us to put in a great burst of effort because we realize the time is short, and the stakes are high.

Then, when it comes to understanding the spiritual landscape, to *redeeming the time*, how are we doing? All too often we tend to ignore the Good News of salvation, to be apathetic towards our role as ambassadors, to ignore the Church's unique role as the Bride of Christ.

Shouldn't we have the same sense of urgency? Immanency is a great theological concept. It means that since something could happen at any time, we act in just the same way as that big push before a big trip! We have a great burst of energy, checking and double-checking every last detail until we rest in anticipation of the blessing to come. Spiritually speaking, this means that since the Rapture could occur at any moment, we make every effort to fulfill our calling to make disciples and reach the lost before the Church is removed.

Consider again what we have been using as our theme verse this year:

One thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead. . . I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Philippians 3:13-14

Do you see that in the context of athletics, this is the language of the one getting ready for the finishing sprint? You and I should desire to be found “pressing toward the goal” of reaching the lost at the moment the trumpet sounds and we are snatched away to be with our Lord!

Second, who exactly is Christ coming for? Who is He going to Rapture to Himself and take to the place He has prepared in His Father’s house? Jesus is not coming for moral, respectable people. He is not coming for people who can claim to have faithfully attended church all their lives; for those who have observed every religious ritual, and so on. All of these may be good, but what does the Scripture say? He is coming for those who are “in Christ.” (1Thessalonians 4:16)

You see it is by grace we are saved, through faith and apart from works. (Ephesians 2:8-9) It is about receiving, through faith, the great gift of God which is available through faith in the Son. Specifically, have you placed your faith in *who* Jesus is (the Son of God), and *what* He has done for you (bore your sins at the cross, and received the punishment for them that was your due)?

If you haven’t already done so, on behalf of Jesus Christ, I urge you this minute to place your faith in Him that you too might join the great number of those whom Christ is going to *snatch away* to the place He has prepared for them—that where He is, there they might be also!



*For the Lord himself will descend from
heaven with a shout, with the voice of the
archangel, and with God's trumpet. The
dead in Christ will rise first,*

1 Thessalonians 4:16 WEB





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