

The Rapture: Physical or Spiritual?

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We talked last week about the passing away of the old heaven and earth and the establishment of the new heaven and earth. I stated that we are NOW living in the new heaven and earth. Obviously I don't view the new heaven and earth as physical, we are certainly not living in a physical paradise. I believe that the new heaven and earth is a spiritual reality. I believe that Isaiah 65-66 and 2 Peter 3 and Revelation 21-22 speak of spiritual truths not physical truths. Am I spiritualizing too much of the Bible? Is it wrong to make spiritual application to things or is it the way that things should be interpreted?

John 6:62-63 (NKJV) "What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before? 63 "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.

Jesus' message was not earthly or fleshly in hope, but he came to bear testimony unto the spiritual. Entry into his kingdom requires a spiritual birth.

John 1:17 (NKJV) For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

What is meant by truth? Jesus said in his prayer to God in John 17:17, "Thy Word is truth," but this can't be what he means here because the law is also the word of God. The law was not the truth, and the truth was not the law, but they were both the Word of God. What then is the difference?

Hebrews 10:1 (NKJV) For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.

The law was a shadow or type of good things to come. The purpose of the law was to set forth spiritual things by its physical types and shadows.

Hebrews 8:5 (NKJV) who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, "See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain."

The purpose of the tabernacle built by Moses was never intended to be anything more than a pattern, for the purpose of leading man to the spiritual tabernacle.

Hebrews 9:9-11 (NKJV) It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience; 10 concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation. 11 But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation.

The first tabernacle with all its physical things represented the tabernacle to come under Christ, which is not made with hands; meaning that it is **spiritual** in nature.

What is truth then that came by Jesus Christ? Truth is the spiritual nature of the NT system in contrast to the fleshly nature of the OT system. This is seen in the nature of the two sons of Abraham; Ishmael and Isaac.

Galatians 4:21-31 (NKJV) Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? 22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. 23 But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, 24 which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar; 25 for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children; 26 but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. 27 For it is written: "Rejoice, O barren, You who do not bear! Break forth and shout, You who are not in labor! For the desolate has many more children Than she who has a husband." 28 Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise. But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now. 30 Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman." 31 So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.

The mothers of these two sons represent the two covenants, and the two sons represent the two nations born of the covenants, namely physical and spiritual Israel. I believe that God wants us to see the **priority of the spiritual over the physical.**

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 (NKJV) Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. 17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, 18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

God wants us to realize that the totality of our existence is not confined to that which can be experienced by the five senses. When we look around us we see a world that has visuals and textures and smells and sounds. It is so easy for man's attention to be drawn away from the **creator** to the **creation** and we live as if this is our reality. When man fails to realize his essential spiritual nature he drifts from the God who is a spirit. God wants us to realize that there is more to man than what meets the eye. We are spiritual beings in the here and now. Sometimes we act as if were physical now and we'll be spiritual later, that is wrong. You and I are spiritual being's right here, right now.

Because God is drawing our attention to the spiritual I want to make a case to you of understanding the eschatological texts in the NT in a spiritual sense. I want to ask you to review your paradigm of eschatology. When you read 2 Peter 3 about the heavens melting and the earth being burned up and all that. If that is physical none of us has any arguments as to whether that has happened. The earth is not toast. But if these are physical words describing spiritual realities then it's going to change our paradigms. Jesus said he was going to come in his disciple's life. Was he mistaken? If these difficult texts are understood **spiritually** then the time frames don't have to be explained away. Jesus meant exactly what he said. If we say these men were mistaken on the time references then we are in fact questioning inspiration.

Jesus said:

Matthew 16:6-7 (NKJV) Then Jesus said to them, "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees." 7 And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "It is because we have taken no bread."

Notice Jesus response to them:

Matthew 16:8-11 (NKJV) But Jesus, being aware of it, said to them, "O you of little faith, why do you reason among yourselves because you have brought no bread? 9 "Do you not yet understand, or remember the five loaves of the five thousand and how many baskets you took up? 10 "Nor the seven loaves of the four thousand and how many large baskets you took up? 11 "How is it you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread?; but to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

When Jesus said leaven, they took it to mean the **physical leaven** that leavens bread. They didn't understand how Jesus was using the word leaven. Jesus was talking about a **spiritual** influence but he used physical words to describe spiritual realities.

In John 2 Jesus said:

John 2:19-21 (NKJV) Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." 20 Then the Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" 21 But He was speaking of the temple of His body.

They assigned their own meaning to the temple and therefore didn't understand what Jesus was saying. They didn't understand how Jesus was using the word. We need to make sure we understand how each other are using words when we communicate. If it is important to understand how others are using words how much more important is it to understand how our God uses words.

Had you ever noticed that the disciples in the first century missed the second coming of **Elijah**? There is a prophecy in:

Malachi 4:5 (NKJV) Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.

In one of his discussions with the disciples they questioned him on this prophecy.

Matthew 17:10-12 (NKJV) And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" 11 Jesus answered and said to them, "Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things. 12 "But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands." 13 Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist.

They knew the prophecy about Elijah, apparently they thought it would be fulfilled physically. It was **actually** fulfilled but it was not **physically** fulfilled. John came in the Spirit of Elijah. Speaking to Zacharias his wife Elizabeth the angel said:

Luke 1:17 (NKJV) "He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

The Jews expected the reappearance of the literal Elijah, and John replies to that mistaken notion in:

John 1:21 (NKJV) And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No."

Jesus is telling them if you want to understand the second coming of Elijah you've got to look at the spiritual.

Matthew 11:13-14 (NKJV) "For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. 14 "And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come.

How are we saved?

Ephesians 1:7 (NKJV) In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.

We're saved by his blood. What does that mean? Is the power there **physical** or **spiritual**? Someone will say its physical because he physically shed his blood. Have you got any of it? The blood of Christ is what saves us. And yes Jesus Christ shed his physical blood and yes that is what saves us. **But it is spiritually applied**, is it not? We don't have the physical blood of Jesus.

Let me give you a case for a spiritual model -- Adam. We all know that he is responsible for the fall. Adam sinned. What was his basic problem? Was it the fruit that he ate? Was his problem fruit or was it not a spiritual problem? Because of Adam we all share this spiritual problem -- we are all spiritually separated from God because of our sin.

Lets talk about the **kingdom** that the Messiah was to bring into the world. Lets examine what the nature of that kingdom is because when the Bible says it was at hand, it either was or it wasn't. If it is a **physical kingdom** and its going to happen over in the physical city of modern Jerusalem, that hasn't happened. What does the Bible say about this kingdom?

1 Corinthians 15:50 (NKJV) Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.

John 18:36 (NKJV) Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here."

Hebrews 11:10-16 (NKJV) for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. 13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. 14 For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. 15 And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

Luke 17:20-21 (NKJV) Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; 21 "nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you."

We are so physically minded we put so much emphasis on the physical. But the spirit is where three things are -- the **value**, the **power** and the **need**. The **value** for mankind is in the spirit. Men, how do you show your love to your wife on a daily basis? Perhaps by a hug. Women, what is the value in that hug for you? Let's say that that man was insincere and that he no longer loved you. Would his hug mean anything, would it hold any value? It might even become a reprehensible thing to you. On the other hand if, God forbid, that your husband should become a quadriplegic and lose his ability to hug you. As long as you know that the love for you is in his heart then you can live without the hugs. Women, if you could have one or the other, the love in his heart or the hugs, which one would you take? You would want the love because the value is in the spirit, not in the physical.

The **power** is also in the spirit.

1 John 3:1-2 (NKJV) Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. 2 Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

This is clearly a second coming passage. John says that when he appears we're going to see him as he is. Notice that it doesn't say we're going to see him as he was. We'll see him as he **is**. Now someone describe Jesus Christ to me. How would you describe Him? Loving, kind, gentle, compassionate, merciful. Now these things are all **spiritual**. Tell me what he looks like physically. About five foot six inches tall, dark hair, brown eyes. What if Jesus appeared to you physically tonight and tomorrow you told people about it, what is the first question they would ask you? What did he look like? Let's say that you described him physically to them. **How much power would there be in that description to transform your life? None.** But when we look upon Jesus Christ as he is and see his mercy and kindness, and love and righteousness, these things are able to transform our lives. That is where the power is. The power is not in the physical but the spiritual.

The **need** is also in the spirit. Isn't our need truly spiritual? What does Genesis 6 say about the earth:

Genesis 6:11-12 (NKJV) The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. 12 So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth.

The earth was corrupt. Now let's say that we could take all humans and transport them to another planet. Now look back at the earth is it still corrupt? No. The problem is man. It's the same problem that is in our society today. The problem is within us. We don't need God to burn up the earth and make a new one. What we need is something that deals with the spirit of man. We need a new heart, a spiritual change. So the spiritual realm is where the value is, it's where the power is and folks it's where the need is.

How does God communicate to us about this spiritual dimension of life? That is what the kingdom of God is all about. The kingdom of heaven is intended to lift you up to live in the realm of the spirit on a consistent daily basis. How does God equip us to see the kingdom of God which we cannot see with the physical eye? Well the first step is we need a spiritual birth. Then he gives us a vocabulary. As vocabularies are developed we can conceptualize. God has done that for mankind in at least two ways. 1. Through the physical creation, the sun, the moon, and the stars. Light and darkness. God teaches us through our material universe. You know what it's like to stumble around in the darkness and not know where you are going. That is what it's like for someone who doesn't have the counsel of my word. You know how clearly you see things when the sun is out and it's bright? That is what life is like when you walk in the counsel of my word. When Jesus gave sight to the physically blind, He illustrated a point about spiritual sight and spiritual blindness:

John 9:39 (KJV) And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind.

Had he been talking about physical sight and blindness, He would have been promising physical blindness to most of mankind. However, he used the physical to illustrate the spiritual.

God also allowed us to develop a conceptual vocabulary through the **Jewish nation**. God set up a priesthood and a sacrifice and a temple and all those things. And when you and I learn what a high priest was and what he did and why he did it, then we can take that information and transfer it to the spiritual realm because God wasn't really talking about the physical high priest anymore than he was the physical temple. That box that Solomon built was a symbolic place for the presence of God to reside. But God desired to live in the hearts of men. To walk among us but sin death prevented that. Sin death separated men from God. But God had a plan and from 30 AD to 70 AD he created a new temple made out of living human spirits. Then he destroyed the old one and moved into the new one. And today he walks among us.

When we talk about a conceptual vocabulary we're talking about physical words that allow us to peer into the spiritual realm. We need to understand that this material creation and the Jewish system is God's way of giving us insight into the spiritual realm. By the earthly tabernacle with its curtain, God was saying you're here and I'm here. I want you to be where I am but it can't be because of your sin. God was illustrating man's spiritual condition.

Keep this idea of the **spiritual kingdom** and spiritual realities in mind as we look at the famous rapture passage. When the Thessalonians of the first century read this passage what did they understand?

1 Thessalonians 4:14-17 (NKJV) For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. 15 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. 16 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. 17 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.

Many Christians today view this passage as an escape from the troubles of this world.

They believe that the Church will be "**raptured**" out of this world. I'm sure you've seen the pictures of the unmanned cars crashing and bodies coming out of the graves with everyone going up into the sky. Do the Scriptures teach this kind of escapism? I think just the opposite, Jesus in his high priestly prayer prayed that the Father would "*not to take them (the elect) out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one*" (*John 17:15*).

Let's look at this text and see if we can't understand what the Lord is teaching us. First of all who are those who **sleep in Jesus**? These are the dead saints of the OC. Prior to Christ resurrection all those believers who died did not go to heaven but to Abraham's bosom. They couldn't enter the presence of God until sin had been dealt with.

Luke 16:22 (NKJV) "So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried.

At the second coming these saints were taken into the presence of God, they experienced a resurrection. Also notice what Paul wrote: "By the word of the Lord, that **we** who are **alive**, and **remain until** the coming of the Lord" in both verses 15 & 17 of 1 Thessalonians. They were expecting the parousia in **their** lifetime. We need to keep in mind audience relevance as we read the Bible. We need to stop looking at the NT as if it was written in our generation. The Bible was not written **to** us but it was written **for** us.

16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God.

This is figurative or apocalyptic language speaking of judgement. Comparing this text to a parallel text in Matthew 24 will help us to better understand its meaning.

Matthew 24:30-31 (KJV) And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. 31 And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Does that sound familiar? It should, this is a parallel text to the Thessalonian passage. Jesus spoke these words in the context of the destruction of Jerusalem and said that **their** generation would see all these things fulfilled (Matthew 24:34). In biblical language "**clouds**" are symbolic of God's wrath and judgment against the enemies of His people. David said that the Lord delivered him from his enemies while descending on clouds in Psalm 18:3-15. The Lord said that He would ride into Egypt on a cloud and punish them:

Isaiah 19:1 (KJV) The burden of Egypt. Behold, the LORD rideth upon a swift cloud, and shall come into Egypt: and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence, and the heart of Egypt shall melt in the midst of it.

The Lord did not literally ride on a cloud but Egypt did receive this judgment at the hands of the Assyrians (Isaiah 20:1-6). The idea of Jesus physically coming on the clouds would have been contrary to the nature of their understanding of the OT prophets.

A comparison between 1 Thessalonians 4-5 and Matthew 24 is fascinating. As we keep in mind that Jesus uses apocalyptic language in Matthew 24: 29-35 we can't expect the same language to be literal in 1 Thessalonians 4-5. Those who believe the coming in Matthew refers to the spiritual events surrounding Jerusalem's fall would insist that we not literalize the clouds, the angels or the trumpet blast. If they are not literal in Matthew why would they be in Thessalonians? Matthew is the source of the language in Thessalonians!

1. Christ Himself Returns	Matt. 24:30	I Thess. 4:16
2. From Heaven	Matt. 24:30	I Thess. 4:16
3. With a Shout	Matt. 24:30 (in power)	I Thess. 4:16
4. Accompanied by Angels	Matt. 24:31	I Thess. 4:16
5. With Trumpet of God	Matt. 24:31	I Thess. 4:16
6. Believers Gathered	Matt. 24:31	I Thess. 4:17

7. In Clouds	Matt. 24:30	I Thess. 4:17
8. Time Unknown	Matt. 24:36	I Thess. 5:1-2
9. Will Come as a Thief	Matt. 24:43	I Thess. 5:2,4
10. Unbelievers Unaware of Impending Judgment	Matt. 24:37-39	I Thess. 5:3
11. Judgment Comes as Travail upon Expectant Mother	Matt. 24:8	I Thess. 5:3
12. Believers to Watch	Matt. 24:42	I Thess. 5:4
13. Warning Against Drunkenness	Matt. 24:49	I Thess. 5:7

In Matthew 24 Jesus predicted his coming to gather together the saints in that generation. In 1 Thessalonians 4-5 Paul spoke of the same coming of the Lord to gather the saints. How many comings of the Lord, with his angels, in fire, in power and glory, to gather the saints, are there in the NT? Just ONE! The conclusion is inescapable that 1 Thessalonians 4-5 is dealing with exactly the same coming, judgment, and gathering that Matt. 24 is.

You might ask, "what does the Bible mean when it says that we shall be caught up together to meet the Lord in the air?" Does this mean we'll be sucked up into the sky? What does the word "**air**" mean? Is it in our atmosphere or the air we breathe? I think that Ephesians two gives us an idea of what air means here.

Eph 2:2: "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience."

The word "air" is another word for heavenly or spiritual realm. Satan was always an opponent of the scheme of the redemption as we can see throughout the Bible. He **was** the prince of the power of the air. In Rom. 16:20 Paul says that Satan would be crushed "shortly" under **their** feet (original relevance). Jesus now has taken over that sphere and rules in the "air" with the saints since the destruction of Jerusalem. If that is the same "air" where the saints were to meet and be gathered, then there is no necessity for us to believe that the rapture gathering and meeting was to be physical. It was accomplished when the faithful remnant of Jewish believers with the in-grafted Gentiles was transformed into Christ's new spiritual Israel when the old covenant was taken away in AD 70. The "gathering together" is the heavenly places in Christ - the spiritual kingdom of God. Being caught up together in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air is simply accommodative language denoting the end-of-the-age gathering together of God's elect.

Ephesians 1:10 (NKJV) that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth; in Him.

To insist on a literal reading of that which is clearly symbolic language is to miss the spiritual truths contained in such passages.

Verse 17 says that we are going to "meet the Lord in the air", the word **'meet'** *apanteas*

(*ap-an'tay-sis*) is only used three times in the Bible, each time **signifying the sending of an advance party to meet a dignitary, and then escort him back to where they came from.** In the case of **Acts 28:15**, the Christians in Rome went out to 'meet' Paul at the Appii forum, and then they escorted him back to their homes. The other usage of this word is found in the parable of the ten virgins, in **Matthew 25**. In the parable of the ten virgins, the kingdom of heaven "is likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom." The word used to 'meet' the bridegroom is '*apanteas*', which means to meet to escort back, as is evidenced by the fact that they met the bridegroom, and then went in to the house from which they came:

Matthew 25:10 (NKJV) "And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut. V13 Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming."

In verse 13, Christ clarifies that this is what will occur in that generation when He comes. **The significance of this is that when Christ came in the clouds, he literally, yet spiritually, gathered those that were alive to be caught up in the kingdom with Jesus Christ,** and Jesus Christ spiritually returned with the believers to the earth, to ever be with them. This was a spiritual event that was visibly manifest in the destruction of Jerusalem.

Did you know that a number of historians have substantiated the fact that Christ's coming in the clouds occurred in that generation? **Josephus**, a Jewish general present at the destruction of Jerusalem, wrote of the coming in the clouds as being a very real event (See Wars of the Jews Archive). He wrote:

Besides these [signs], a few days after that feast, on the one-and-twentieth day of the month Artemisius, [Jyar,] a certain prodigious and incredible phenomenon appeared; I suppose the account of it would seem to be a fable, were it not related by those that saw it, and were not the events that followed it of so considerable a nature as to deserve such signals; for, before sun-setting, chariots and troops of soldiers in their armour were seen running about among the clouds, and surrounding of cities. Moreover, at that feast which we call Pentecost, as the priests were going by night into the inner [court of the] temple, as their custom was, to perform their sacred ministrations, they said that, in the first place, they felt a quaking, and heard a great noise, and after that they heard a sound as of a great multitude, saying, "Let us remove hence."

Tacitus, the Roman historian, relating the same events, wrote:

"In the sky appeared a vision of armies in conflict, of glittering armour. A sudden lightening flash from the clouds lit up the Temple. The doors of the holy place abruptly opened, a superhuman voice was heard to declare that the gods were leaving it, and in the same instant came the rushing tumult of their departure" (Histories, v. 13).

Eusebius, the bishop at Palestine (See Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History), wrote this in the fourth century:

"For before the setting of the sun chariots and armed troops were seen throughout the whole region in mid-air, wheeling through the clouds and encircling the cities.

The establishment of the kingdom is directly related to the 'gathering of the saints' in that generation, as seen in Matthew 24:30-31. In fact, the very next chapter has the explanation of the

gathering and the kingdom in parabolic form. In the parable of the sheep and goats, Christ identifies that the righteous and the wicked would be gathered when He came later in that generation (v. 31; see Matt. 16:27-28). At the time of this gathering, Christ burns the wicked with fire, but says to the righteous, *"Come, ye blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."* This is precisely the same gathering as seen in 1 Thess. 4:17:

The word "**rapture**" is nowhere to be found in the Bible, neither is it taught there. There is no Scriptural support for it. This escapist philosophy is pure fiction. We are not taught to escape reality in the Scripture, but rather to face it knowing that God will work all things out for our good (Rom. 8:28-30). When Jesus Christ returned he gathered the elect of all the ages into his kingdom. We as believers now live in the kingdom of God. May we learn to focus on the spiritual and not the physical. Remember the value, the power and the need are in the spiritual realm and not the physical.

This message was preached by [David B. Curtis](#) on May 11, 1997.