

13

RAPTURE DOCTRINE EXAMINED

-

We have been taking an introductory consideration of the Blessed Hope. This has consisted in looking at the Second Advent of Christ, what it is all about, and the various time periods associated with it. We have seen from the witness of the prophetic scriptures that we are already in the first phase of the Second Advent of Christ and that Christ is among His people in a very special way carrying out a work.

In this edition and others to come, we will be focusing attention on the key feature of the blessed hope, erroneously called "The Rapture" In "God's Pattern Church", we drew attention to some erroneous practices in the church world today. Now we are tackling doctrinal errors crippling the growth and mission of the church whilst creating false hopes.

Our burden in these new series of teachings has been exposing refuge of lies. Refuge always has to do with hopes. If there are false hopes, then there must be true hopes. It is essential that the Lord's people have a clear understanding of the Living hope; the sure hope that is held out by God unto the church.

In looking at the Second Advent, we observed that there are as many divergent views on the subject as there are denominations. What is more perplexing is that if you take any doctrinal position held by one denomination, you will meet with absurdities; line of thoughts at variance with others on the same subject. We intend to take up these absurdities; in their place we hope to minister the living hope; something that we can hold unto.

For a start, let us take two passages in the New Testament, commonly used by preachers to teach the Rapture doctrine.

The first passage is Titus 2:11 – 14.

¹¹For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men. ¹²Teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lust, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; ¹³Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ. ¹⁴Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

The verse of interest is verse 13: looking for that blessed hope which is realised at the glorious appearing of the great God and our Lord Jesus Christ. The second passage is Hebrews 9:24-28

²⁴For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true, but into heaven itself now to appear in the presence of God for us; ²⁵Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others. ²⁶For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. ²⁷And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgement, ²⁸So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many, and unto them that look for Him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.

The doctrine of the Rapture thought to be what the blessed hope consists of, teaches that when the Lord Jesus Christ comes, he descends from heaven into the atmospheric heavens, that is, the sky. And then the dead in Christ will rise from their grave. And we, the alive and remaining of the children of God, will be caught up together with these ones that are risen from their graves, to meet the Lord in the air.

In the doctrine of Rapture, it is believed that the "alive and remaining ones" will be caught up; they will not die. But then, strong adherents of this doctrine have this view that all must die. This is because Hebrew 9:27 reads: "*it is appointed unto men once to die, and after that the judgement*".

Some go on to say that in the scriptures, there are two men that escaped death. The first is Enoch in Genesis 5:19-24, and the second is Elijah in 2 Kings 19. And they say, because it is appointed unto men once to die, Enoch and Elijah will come back to the earth and will be killed according to Revelation (11:3-11). Many preachers believe that this passage speaks of Enoch and Elijah coming to the earth to pass the way all mortals must go; going to glory through the gateway of death.

So, we are told by men, even great Bible scholars that the two witnesses are Enoch and Elijah. Others say "Well, they must be Moses and Elijah since these two witnesses are said to have power to turn water into blood, and in the book of Exodus, we read that Moses turned water into blood". So, the thought is that if Moses and Elijah or Enoch and Elijah who had gone to heaven must come back to the earth to die, then who will escape death.

One thing we might note from this is that although the people believe in the Rapture, their belief in Hebrew 9:27 as it is generally taught in the denominational churches seriously contradicts this doctrine! Whenever there has been any strongly held doctrinal error it has always had a crushing negative effect on her. Her testimony and service are always adversely affected under such circumstance.

Some argue that it does not really matter what the future hopes of the church are. When the time comes, by and by, the church will enter into whatever hopes are prepared for her of God. But is that really true that it does not matter what you believe? Do men enter into the things of redemption without walking in the light of these being positively exercised by their gracious power?

When we look at the scriptures, on the average, one verse out of every seven has to do with the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, in the Old Testament, there are far more prophecies on the Second Advent than on the first. It was so much so that the Jews thought that it would be just one advent, that glorious coming in which the Lord Jesus Christ comes to set up his kingdom over all the earth. It is for that reason they were not able to understand the appearing of the lowly and meek Saviour preaching the

gospel of the kingdom. And if there is so much witness as to the Second Advent, we know that of necessity, there must be God's purpose in it.

We need not hurry over this matter. We simply say at this point that the doctrine of the Rapture is most unfortunate. No single doctrine in all of the New Testament scriptures that has been so perverted as that which relates to the exaltation of the church to the place of honour and glory with the Lord Jesus Christ. There is so much gravitation towards earthly things among the Lord's people because what shall be is not clearly spelt out. We shall take out time and space to show the fallacy and inconsistency in the doctrine of the Rapture

Our next object is to look closely at Hebrews 9:27, If death is an appointment, then the Lord Jesus Christ died by the death sentence passed on all humanity. Did Jesus Christ really die in Adam? The death sentence that God passed on Adam and Eve and transferred to all of his posterity, was it really applicable to the Lord Jesus Christ? Is death really the gateway to glory? Is death a friend?

You know, in most traditions and cultures, death is revered. In most cultures of the world, there is a great belief in death. They may say that death is a transition; a transition into a higher life. But is physical death really a transition? Is death a gateway to glory?

In our meditation on the blessed hope, we are going to show very clearly that it is God's purpose that the last members of the church class (the overcoming saints at the time of the end who hold on to the Parousia ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ) break loose from the bondage of death.

We know that there is going to be a time of great tribulation. It will make nonsense of all the time of trouble that humanity has known in the six thousand years of recorded human history; but God's Word teaches that the faith structure of the Lord's people will be so much strengthened by Christ that men will have power over all opposition and will break free from all evil.

Let all who love the name of the Lord begin to take up strong intercessory prayers at this time for God's gracious intervention in the church. All refuge of lies must be burnt away. The true hopes must be held forth unto the Lord's people. Faith springs from true spiritual knowledge.

There must be a return to seeking the Lord on the pages of the written word, trusting in the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. There must be an intense desire to know the Lord. The prophetic subjects must come alive again. Men must begin to burn the midnight oil to know what the scriptures say about the things that pertain to their full redemption.

One characteristic that will be found among the Lord's people, among those that are measurably faithful, is that they will take pains to prove the truth or otherwise of every doctrine. Whatever a man believes affects his lifestyle. There is going to be a passionate hunger for Him, an eager and patient waiting for the Epiphaneia of Christ; the unveiling of Christ and the promise of the subsequent lifting up of the church to incorruptibility; and then to immortality. It is the ministry of the Word (the prophetic Word) that will cause this hunger in the hearts of the Lord's people. *Hebrews 9:28 says "So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many, and unto them that look for Him..."* The Amplified Bible says *unto them that eagerly and patiently wait for Him."*

So, there must be that spiritual hunger within a soul who seeks to have a throne-placement in the kingdom that is to be revealed. We cannot continue the way we are and hope to share in the full salvation that is in Christ Jesus. There is a great hunger for perfection, a burning hunger for the fullness of his life, an earnest desire for Him that must be created in us. If the Lord will be the desire of all nations according to Haggai 2:7 then He must first of all be the sole and burning desire of His own people.

It is the truth of God's Word that will open our eyes to the reality that is in Christ Jesus and cause our hearts to hunger for Him. And if that truth is not known and taught to the Lord's people in the power of the

Spirit; if it is not kept in a living way before the view of the people, then there is no way the Lord's people can enter into the chief inheritance. What you do not see, you cannot become. As in Hebrews 9:28 so also we find in Titus 2:23; "*looking for*", having an eager desire, deep longings and patiently waiting for the Epiphaneia of the Lord is the outcome of a healthy spiritual life.

Do you possess this hunger in your heart? "Looking for that blessed hope..." It is something to look for. Matthew 25:1 says, "*Then shall the kingdom of heaven become like ten virgins who took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom*". There is a spiritual journey, a spiritual course that must be entered into. Our devotional lives must be cured. There must be a hunger for the Lord, a crying out from our hearts that He might make himself known unto us. I John 3:1-3

¹BEHOLD, what manner of Love the Father has bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God. therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not. ²Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as he is. ³And every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

Earnestly seek the Lord to create in you and interest in the matter at hand. For the next several editions, we will be looking at *the Rapture* and showing that it is dangerous for the church to continue blindly in it. We must be awakened to what the true hopes are that the Lord has reserved for her, so that she might intelligently follow the Lord faithfully. May the Lord bless you in Jesus Name Amen.

14

RAPTURE

DOCTRINE

EXAMINED

In the last edition, we briefly highlighted two doctrines that have done and continue to do so much damage to the church. The first is the doctrine of Rapture and the second is the doctrine that all must die. It is said, "*It is appointed unto men once to die...*" We also said the death is not an appointment, it is a judgmental process that came upon man in Adam; and in Christ that sentence is lifted from the believer. Death is not the gateway to Life, rather, resurrection is the gateway to life and the first resurrection is the true hope that Christ has established for the church.

In this edition, we begin an examination of the Rapture Doctrine. Our first reading will be taken from Matthew 11:25-27

²⁵At that time, Jesus answered and said, I thank thee O Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth, because thou has hid these things from the wise and prudent and has revealed them unto babes. ²⁶Even so Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight. ²⁷All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son and He to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him.

Straightaway, we want to establish the fact that the revelation of God's Word is not based on Scholarship; it is not dependent of you being a titled priest. As it is revealed here, no man knoweth the Son, but the Father. The knowledge of the Son is the exclusive property of the Father. And again, no man knoweth the Father save the son and to whom the son shall choose to reveal him.

There are several passages in scriptures teaching us that meekness, humility, teachableness are the essential qualities of life that are to be found in those that are to receive the revelation of Christ in his Word. Psalm 25:9 is straight to the point, God will teach the meek his ways. In the fourteenth verse, we are told that the secrets of the Lord are with them that fear him.

So, not only must we be humble in our disposition, but also there must be in us that growing urge, the continuous cry for more of Christ.. In this last hour, many good and great people will make costly mistakes acting from self-sufficiency; but blessed are those who are made to know that until they stand in the perfection that is in Christ, until they break free from all the limitations of the present mortal life, they have not yet come into all that the Lord has prepared for them. We must continue to seek the Lord in all humility.

So we come to the matter of the Rapture. We can show (and you may want to check any encyclopaedia on church history) that the doctrine of the Rapture is less than two hundred years old. A young lady had a dream in which she saw several persons in an upward flight; looking up, she saw Jesus in the sky. The dream was so real to her that she told it to the "pastor" in her church, and of course the man shouted: Ah that must be the meaning of 1 Thessalonians 4. Some few Sundays later, he started to teach the Rapture drawing inspiration from the young lady's dream.

John Darby the great Bible Scholar who edited a version of the Bible was of the same denominational system and he soon got influenced by the teaching of his co-minister and elaborated upon it, using scriptures he feels to be in harmony with the doctrine. All these elaborations were later brought into his version of the Bible as footnotes to the relevant to the Bible passage. Some years later, Doctor Scofield (Of course you might know the Scofield reference Bible) also included all these comments in his edition of the Bible.

The apostles never taught the Rapture doctrine; nor was it ever preached in the church till about two hundred years ago. It is founded on a dream.

Turn to Jeremiah 23, you will find that this tendency of ministering from dreams and visions that is supposed to have been received of the Lord has been there of old. God has warned His people in ancient times, and He is still warning His people today., to separate dreams, visions and revelations from God's Word. Dreams, visions and revelations are vehicles through which God can make known to us His will. Relative to the Word of God, (the written word) they are of secondary importance; and only as a revelation, a dream, a trance, a vision, a prophetic utterance is in harmony with the teachings of God's Word should it be received.

So, in Jeremiah 23:25-26 we read the following words

²⁵I have heard what the prophets said, that prophesy lies in my name, saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed. ²⁶How long shall this be in the heart of the prophets that prophesy lies? Yea they are prophets of the deceit of their own hearts...

We will stop the reading here for a while. Here is revealed one source of erroneous doctrine. In our walk with God, we are to keep our hearts in a steady state of fellowship with Him. We are to walk in the Spirit of the fear of God. The longings for God must not be relegated to the background. Sometimes, the work of the ministry can just be a mere routine, but we should know that the Lord is more interested in who we are and of our becoming like him than merely doing his works. When we are what God wants us to be, then we are better able to do the works that God wants us to do.

So, deceit is at the root of the dreams of the prophets described in the above passage. The Bible says some dreams come as carryovers of the day's activities. Returning to the reading, we come to verse 27-28

²⁷(These prophets) which think to cause my people to forget my name by their dreams, which they tell every man to his neighbour, as their Fathers have forgotten my name for Baal. ²⁸The prophet that hath a dream let him tell a dream and he that hath my word let him tell my word faithfully. (We shall talk about what amounts to speaking the word of God faithfully) What is the chaff to the wheat saith the LORD

What is the chaff of dreams and visions to the wheat of God's Word? When you remove the husk from grains, what is left is called chaff. The main meal is in the grain. So the Lord asks, "what is the chaff" (symbolic of a dream, a vision, a trance, revelation etc) to the wheat (symbolic of the written word of God). And he says, "*he that hath my words let him speak it faithfully*". Verse 29

²⁹Is not my Word like as a fire? saith the Lord, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?

The rock of false doctrine will be broken in pieces as the truth of God's Word is empowered by God in the ministry of such that humbly seek Him.

This brings us to a very important observation. The Bible says the witnesses of at least two or three writers are required for every doctrinal position. In 2 Corinthians 13:1 we are told that at the mouth of two

or three witnesses shall every word be established. This is a key principle given us that is to be held by everyone that labour in the ministry of the Word. Who is a witness? A writer of the scriptures is a witness.

So, the reference is not just to two or three passages. For example, if a writer, say Paul who wrote over half of the New Testament writings, witnesses to a subject, all the things he has written concerning that matter constitute just one witness. Because we are told in Isaiah 28, that the character of God's unveiling of himself to His prophets, is to one a little and to another a little. So, all prophets who may have a witness on any given matter in the mind of God must be consulted. Not until the witnesses of all writers concerning that subject matter are considered, we cannot say that we have come to full and clear understanding of the matter yet.

So a doctrine can only be established when it is harmonious with all witnesses of scripture on the same subject, and again, it is to be harmonious with every other truth of God's Word, because the truth is a Person and every one truth must agree with other truths.

We find the same principle in *Hebrews 1:1: GOD, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spoke in time past unto the Fathers by the prophets*. The phrase "at sundry times" mean at different occasions those servants of God have received several parts of the subject matter of redemption, and each had faithfully ministered that part. So, not until all scriptures concerning a doctrinal position are examined, a wrong position can only be the result.

That brings us to our subject. We will be looking at all passages that are often used to teach the Rapture. We will begin with the synoptic gospels.

In the teachings of Jesus concerning the Second Advent, as recorded in the synoptic gospels, He mentions two person in the Old Testament. The first is Noah and the second is Lot. Noah is used to show a type of the Parousia of Christ (we will be looking at that more closely) while Lot is used to show a type of the Epiphaneia. When the witnesses given of Christ concerning these two persons and their histories are confused, the result will be a wrong interpretation. Come to Matthew 24:36-43.

³⁶But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.

³⁷But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the Parousia of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood...

In the days of Noah, referred to above as the days before the flood, Noah ministered for one hundred and twenty years, though he lived for about six hundred years. The apostle Peter says Noah was a teacher of Righteousness, warning concerning judgements of the world that then was. The pre-flood ministry of Noah parallels the ministry of Christ during the Parousia.

We read verse 38 again down to verse 41

³⁸For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, ³⁹And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away (taking them all away in judgement) so shall also the Parousia of the Son of man be ⁴⁰Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken and the other left.

⁴¹Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken and the other left.

These two verses (40 and 41) are quite important, because they are often referred to when the doctrine of the Rapture is preached. Many read into the two verses, the following thought: "*Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air and the other left*". That is the understanding they will have us receive from this passage.

Now, you will notice the gospel according to Matthew, the one according to Mark and the one according to Luke are all said to be synoptic. Since all three writers cover this very teaching, it will be profitable to see what the other two writers have to say. So turn with me to Mark 13:24-37;

²⁴But in those days after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, ²⁵And the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken. ²⁶And then shall they see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. ²⁶And then shall He send His angels and shall gather together His Elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven... (We move straight to verse 32) ...³²But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no not the angels which are in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father.

³³Take ye heed, watch and pray for you know not when the time is. ³⁴For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work and commanded the porter to watch. ³⁵Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh...

There is a difference between the coming of the master of the house when he takes account with His own and when the Lord of all the earth, the judge of all the earth comes in judgement, preparatory to taking over the kingdoms of this world. So, he says here,

³⁵...for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even or at midnight, or at the cock crowing, or in the morning. ³⁶Lest coming suddenly, he finds you sleeping. And what I say unto you, I say unto all. Watch

Four time periods are given in the Parousia. Here, they are symbolically given to us as the evening (the beginning period of the Parousia), the midnight, the cock crowing and the morning (the morning being the period that leads to the Epiphaneia). And the commandment is for us to watch so that we will not be found sleeping. So waiting for the Lord in his Second Advent is not a passive activity; it is an intense spiritual activity in the realm of the heart, in vital communion with the Lord and in our daily living.

That is the witness of Mark. Mark emphasises in His teaching the Parousia of Christ and does not say anything about what we find in verses 40 and 41 of Matthew 24 that "*one shall be taken and the other left*". But Luke does in Luke 17, to which we now turn. Here, the two names, the man Noah and the man Lot are mentioned, using the events of their times to describe the events of the first two phases in the Second Advent of Christ (The Parousia and the Epiphaneia)

We said earlier that the events associated with Noah relate to the Parousia while the vents associated with Lot relate to the Epiphaneia, the time when the Lord comes in His full glory, bringing good to the redeemed ones and bringing judgements to them that have refused to obey the gospel of Christ. So, the

Epiphaneia is a time of the unveiling of Christ, and the unveiling of the faithful who have come into full union and glory with him. But it is also the time of the unveiling of the wicked. In the Epiphaneia, all things shall be shown in their full light. For in the blazing light of the Lord's appearing, all things shall be revealed in their true pictures. Righteousness and faithfulness shall be rewarded, while wickedness shall be punished.

So let us read Luke 17:26-36

²⁶And as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it also be in the days of the Son of Man...

The word "Day" is in the plural form, implying that the day of the Parousia is actually a time period covering several years. We may not know when it begins, but can tell when it has set in by the activities of Christ in the midst of His people. He comes to His people as the Latter rain awakening and quickening them to the truth of His Word. The discerning at heart, the humble are then able to walk in the things revealed of Christ. We continue to read from verse 27, it says

²⁷They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.

²⁸Likewise also, (the judgement of the flood is as the events surrounding Lot, So we are told) as it was in the days of Lot, they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; ²⁹But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all

We take verse 29 again. It says "*But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all*". It was not the day that Noah entered into the ark that the rain started or the flood came. The rain started seven days after Noah had entered into the ark (Genesis 7:10). But here, an event in the life of Lot is mentioned and used to show us something that belongs to the Epiphaneia, the day in which the Son of Man is revealed, the day of His unveiling.

When he comes in the Parousia, it is as a thief in the night. He is present among His people through His Word and His Spirit, but is not seen of the Church or of the World; but when he comes in the Epiphaneia, the redeemed of the Church class, those counted worthy of the first resurrection, shall see Him as He is for they shall be like Him. They shall become full grown spirit beings and then in the clouds of trouble that shall visit the world, the unsaved and the careless professors of religion, will begin to become aware that the Lord hath taken unto Himself His great power and hath began to reign.

Now, Lot does not represent the best among the Lord's People. He is an overcomer, but he is only so in the secondary sense. Of course we know the story about Abraham and Lot; two persons who came from the same root, who responded to the call of God but did not have the same type of heart disposition towards God in the matter of consecration.

Prophetically, Lot represents those of the Lord's People, who remain in the Spiritual environment of the denominational churches up till the time of the Epiphaneia and were delivered from that order of things just before the outbreak of divine judgement upon Babylon. Lot was delivered out of Sodom (a type of Babylon) just before the city was destroyed. He was a true seed and loved righteousness, but he never could come to a point of taking a decision to leave Sodom even when the things he saw and heard

continually grieved his heart. (2 Peter 2:8). His treasures were right inside the city and he just could not contemplate the loss of fortune that he thinks will follow his exit from the city.

However, at a time in God's economy, when it became very clear that the city was under divine judgement and the wrath of the Almighty God was about to be revealed, Lot knew he had to leave Sodom, even against His will.

Lot came out of Sodom wounded and terribly bruised. His sojourning in the city, his lack of wisdom in not knowing to depart from the city at an auspicious time, caused him a great loss. Not only did he lose his investments in Sodom, (the very things he sought to keep verse 33 of Luke 17), he suffered also the loss of his wife a prophetic figure of that which his soul lusted after.

We are told in I Corinthians 3:13-15 *"that every man's work shall be made manifest. For the day, (the Epiphaneia) shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abides which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward; if any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by Fire"*.

So Lot, a seed of righteousness, was a man of divided loyalty. He had a craving for worldly riches and honour. He sought the chiefest places in "Babylon", and the craving of His heart did not make him to respond to the voice of the Word of the Lord. The Lord Counsels in Matthew 24:15-21, *"when you therefore shall see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet stand in the holy place (who so readeth, let him understand), then let them which be in Judea flee to the mountains"*. And we are to watch and pray ensuring that our flight be not in the winter period of the Epiphaneia, for then shall there be great tribulations. Rather, we are to note the sign of the abomination in the holy place long before, and come out of Babylon at the time of His Parousia when the Lord can still prepare us for the glory that is to be revealed at his appearing.

So, let us read verse 29 of Luke 7 again and continue down to the 34th verse.

²⁹But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. ³⁰Even thus shall it be in the day when the son of man is revealed. ³¹In that day, he, which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: he that is in the field let him likewise not return back. ³²Remember Lot's wife. ³³Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it. ³⁴I tell you, in that night...

Remember, Jesus is the one speaking and this is emphatic *"in that night"*. So, it must be a night period, a night season; But Mark 13:35 tells us of four seasons: the evening, at midnight, at the cock crowing and in the morning. In all of those four time periods, the reference is to the different seasons within the Parousia; but here in Luke 17:34, the reference is to the Epiphaneia, and the word night is used to represent the judgement aspect of the Epiphaneia. When it is light to the faithful, it will be darkness to the wicked.

The symbol of the night is sometimes used to typify a time of trouble, a time of tribulation, a winter period, not conducive for normal activities. The Lord said in John 9:4 *"the night cometh when no man can work"*. So he says *"in that night, (in that night of great trouble), two shall be together, one shall be taken and the other left behind"*. So the one taken is taken in judgement. *"the flood came and took them all away"* Matthew 24:39 says. The one left behind is the one approved.

Of course, from the words of the Lord in verse 37, we know that verses 34 to 36 of that passage point to a gathering together of the eagle saints unto the Lord and His Word at the time of His Parousia; but we will consider that in another meditation.

In closing, take note that there are two time periods in the Second Advent of Christ that are much confused in the church world. The first time period is called the Parousia and it covers many years. The second is the Epiphaneia. For the faithful among the believers, the time of the Epiphaneia is a day of Glory, for she is caught up in the glory of her gracious Lord; but for the world and the careless in the church systems, the Bible says it is going to be a day of woe. Amos 5:18 says, "*Don't look forward to the day of the Lord, for the day of the Lord is darkness and not light*". That is, to those who are not obedient to the ministry of the Lord in His Parousia.

May the Lord bless you. May he keep you alive and awake to His plans and purposes in this last hour. Amen.

15

RAPTURE DOCTRINE EXAMINED

We are bound to give thanks to the Lord for the great work He is doing among his people at this time of the end and we are quite privileged to be alive today. It is required of us to keep seeking God to have a share in this great work. Please turn to Isaiah 28, we will be looking at the ninth and tenth verses using them as entry points into the message of this edition which is a continuation of our examination of the Rapture doctrine. In these two verses, the prophet was asking:

⁹Whom shall He teach knowledge?

The reference is to the Father making the Son of God known, no one knoweth the Son save the Father only. Of course, He will admit men and women into the knowledge of the Son, but here we are about being shown what qualifies one to receive divine teachings.

The message is to those who are already in covenant relationship with God. For the prophecies quite clearly (when you read from verse 1) show God addressing His people at a time of great spiritual declination, when things are not as they were at the beginning. When the standards are falling and there is a lowering of spirituality on all sides.

God will always react to that situation. He will speak to His people, he will turn their hearts back to him; and in doing so, He lays hold upon some and turns them to right living. He makes great demands upon these ones and constitutes them His instruments for reaching others. So this passage speaks of the nature of the divine reaction to things among us, when God desires to bring about change to the situation in the body. If you are quite honest with yourself and with the situation about you, you will notice that although we are moving closer to the end, there is something seriously sick about the visible church systems. God is reacting to correct that; but who will be persons that God will lay hands upon at a time such as this? So the prophet asks:

⁹Whom shall He teach knowledge, and whom shall he make to understand doctrine: and the answers are given; them that are weaned from milk...

The milk is symbolic of the beginning of the doctrines of Christ, those elementary teachings that set forth repentance from dead works and faith towards God; how to walk in victory from such distributed effects of the fall as sickness, poverty, danger. These are the elementary principles of God's Word. And the prophet adds

⁹... them that are drawn from the breasts

Although some may have been saved for twenty, thirty years, the greater many in the visible church systems are customarily hooked to the milk. Paul in Hebrews 5 says that such who use milk are unskillful in the Word of righteousness. But, the one whom the Lord will teach must look beyond worldly lusts and appetites. Victory over sickness, disease, poverty, and related issues is promised to the believer. All of that are included in redemption, but it would be tragic to think that Christianity amounts to just solving man's needs. Christianity first and foremost is to solve God's needs, and when God's needs are met, man's needs are supremely met.

So, them that are weaned from the milk... When the discussion gets a little deeper, when the teaching of God's Word begins to get into the deeper matters of the kingdom, many in the church fall asleep. "Oh your business will prosper; your mother-in-law that is looking for your trouble shall not be able to kill your children". These are the kind of things that many in the church today want to hear. Bu the prophet asks "whom shall He teach knowledge, those that are weaned for the milk..."

Then the question is asked – whom shall he make to understand doctrine? And he answers: them that are drawn from the breasts.

There is something odd that has become common place in the church, and that is that men look at their walk with God as though it is to be influenced only by what they learn from their Sunday school materials. The "breasts" here in Isaiah 28:9 talks about the breasts of the denominational mothers. Whereas human

instruments are used to teach us by God, we being suitably fitted through the baptism of the Holy Spirit to receive help from the Lord directly, we are not by God required just to take hook, line and sinker whatever anyone says even if the person is spitting fire from heaven. It is a better service done to any servant of God if the people prove what he is saying from the scriptures.

So the Lord will reveal His thoughts to them that are weaned from milk them that are drawn from the breasts.

Anyhow, the main purpose of coming to this passage is to take the tenth verse. For God's Word comes in this way, it must be precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little. Of course, that requires that one should be properly focused because it is not like our regular books where the chapter deals with a particular subject and moves on to yet another subject in the second chapter. No.

Paul drawing inspiration from this passage and other passages in the Old Testament says in Hebrews 1:1 in many parts and in diverse manner, God communicated His mind to us all by His prophets in times of old. And there is a reference to how the scriptures came. So, one writer of scriptures may have an insight by divine help into an aspect of a given subject, while another writer of scriptures maybe given entrance into the same subject, but from another standpoint; and because truth is constant and not patented, the many sides of truth become harmonious when they come before full view. For a particular subject matter to be adequately understood therefore, all writers in the scriptures that discuss that same subject matter must be consulted.

So the one the Lord would teach knowledge and make to understand doctrine must be focused, must be patient, he must be humble. He must cast away all the traditions of men that he has been taught and be ready to study God's Word and to learn from him; and we are looking at this in the light of the Rapture doctrine.

We observed in the last edition that this doctrine was never preached by any of the apostles of the early church and was not known in the church until about 200 years ago. The man who first preached it (a man that was eminently spiritual) was Edwin Irvin of the Plymouth Brothers and it was based upon listening to a dream that a girl in his congregation had. But Jeremiah tells us that "he who has a dream, let him tell his dream, and he who has God's Word, let him preach God's Word; what is chaff compared to the wheat".

Of course if this man had simply followed this principle here enunciated (Isaiah 28 and Hebrews 1) he would have known that there was something wrong with reading and understanding I Thessalonians 4 that way.

Anyhow, when he preached it, a fellow minister who was in the assembly, John Darby, was greatly impressed since it suited the fancy of the Lord's people to think that before the great judgements that would crush all the earth, the church would be taken up to safety in the heavens; and when all things have been destroyed, they will come back to be rulers of a world that contains no people but themselves; ruling themselves, kings having no subjects.

So John Darby who edited the King James Version of the Bible placed the teaching of the Rapture in his footnotes. Dr. C. L. Scofield, another great man of God, was so impressed by the doctrine that he also in his edition of the King James Version of the Bible placed the teaching of the Rapture in his footnotes. Whoever buys the Bible, in reading the commentary upon certain verses is likely to buy that idea. D. W. Moody, also a great man of God that worked with a foremost Pentecostal church, included the doctrine in the Sunday school manual of the church. That is how the Pentecostal church came to accept this doctrine of the Rapture.

Now, nothing is said against these eminent servants of God, and we are not about to say that we have ascended to the great heights they attained, but it underscores one point that when it comes to spiritual

things, we must develop the attitude of the Bereans (Acts 17:11). A great man can make a mistake and a mistake rehearsed several times over become unquestionably accepted. The Berean Christians proved what the early church apostles preached and they only received those things because they conformed to the scriptures. The servants of God were very happy with that attitude and said that ...The Berean Christians were more noble than the Christians in Thessalonica who just received the word, were so excited about it, but did not prove it. Every witness concerning a given subject by a writer of scriptures must be consulted before we can see that topic in full view, as the Lord will have us receive it.

We have been able to establish clearly that there are three distinct time periods in what is called, the Second Advent of Christ. The Parousia, which covers so many years, the Epiphaneia which has two contrasting aspects – Christ making Himself known in the fullness of His glory as he reveals the many sons that have come to full union with Him in what is called the Manifestation of the Sons of God, and the judgement aspect in which the Lord judges things that are contrary to His Word and Will; first in His church and then in the nations. The third time period is the Basilea.

Of course we are excited when we find in Finis Dake's Bible, that he sees these three time periods except that he sees the Parousia as talking about the Rapture. So, for Finis Dake, the Rapture is the Parousia. In page 227 of his Bible, He sets this out. So, he talks about the Parousia, then the Second Advent proper that consists of the Epiphaneia and the Basilea.

However, these time periods are marked with several distinguishable characteristics, and by looking at all the things that happen each of the time periods, we know that the Parousia cannot just answer to one single event of catching up people into the air as contained in the Dake's reference Bible. The Parousia is over a period of time not an instance and is included in the Second Advent not out of it.

Now, if you come to Mark 13:34-37

³⁴For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work and commanded the porter to watch. ³⁵Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh - at even or at midnight, or at the cock crowing, or in the morning. ³⁶Lest coming suddenly, he finds you sleeping. ³⁷And what I say unto you, I say unto all. Watch

The passage discusses the Parousia of Christ. It says it could be in the evening, it could be in the morning, it could be in the midnight or it could be in the cock crowing. These are not time elements in our physical day of 24 hours, but that the Parousia will be divided into four distinct brackets in the which the great presence of the Lord will be increasingly felt among his people through the ministry of the Word and of the Spirit.

So, the Parousia covers many years. There are different phases of the Lord's activities among His people in the time of the Parousia.

There are two other things we want to take note of in verse 34. It says for the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work and commanded the porter to watch. Two kinds of servants are revealed here. The first has to do with every man as a servant being busy about the work of the Lord, while the second relates to every man as a porter living a life of watching. All are commanded to work as revealed in verse 34 and at the same time, all are commanded to watch, as shown clearly in verse 35. We are all servants and porters at the same time.

Thus, there are two divisions of the services of the Lord's people. There is the field ministry where, by the grace of God, we serve men in the interest of the Lord. Then there is the Sanctuary ministry where by the Spirit of the Lord, we minister directly to the Lord and are taught of Him concerning the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

The first covers ministry as fulfilled publicly; and we can borrow a phrase from Luke 19:13. It says, "...Occupy till I come..." That has to do with our labour among men, to the unsaved, calling them to the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, to the saved, exhorting them according to the measure of Christ we have; That is the field ministry.

One of the problems of the visible church system is that many are overtly involved in public service that they are virtually lost in it. God is not so much interested in what we do among men (even though we all must serve him) but in making us become His sons in all respects. So, the prophetic element in our walk with God; that finger that point to the coming of the Lord is the porter ministry. Remember, the porter is to watch so that he can open when the Son of Man comes. The porter ministry emphasises a true and proper focus upon Christ. There is also a knowing by the Spirit and by the Word when the time approaches. Such knowledge and focus comes only in the place of a sustained and consistent devotion to the Lord

Much of the problem in the church is that so many persons are busy trying to work and are forgetting this principal element of watching, of growing in Christ, of learning to be sensitive in His presence, of understanding and approaching whatever the Lord is doing at any time; and seeking to be partners together with God in what He is doing. So we are commanded to watch lest when He comes, He finds us sleeping. Many that may be found sleeping at this early period of the Parousia are those who are to some extent faithfully serving God. Brethren, let us not be caught up in the work, let us be caught up with the Lord. When we see Him as He is, we are better able to do acceptably, what He asked us to do,

That takes us to Matthew 25 where these two great aspects of our ministry is clearly set forth. This is a passage that tells of the coming of the Son of God and our going to meet Him. The language is quite clear and does not suggest a sudden flight, but a very deliberate action of moving on to meet with the Lord who keeps revealing Himself through His Word and His Spirit.

There are two parables given us in Matthew 25. In the first 13 verses, you have the parable that brings to light the porter's aspect of our ministry, that prophetic dimension of our ministry in which we are to spend so much time with God. It involves ministering in praise and worship, seeking His glory in the midst of the earth; yes ministering in His pleasure and satisfaction. And in waiting upon Him, receiving divine communications that teach us the things that belong to the fullness of redemption. So, the first thirteen verses cover that aspect. But the aspect that covers occupy till I come is treated from verse 14 and goes on till verse 30.

Now we take the reading of Mathew 25, the very first verse, it says

¹Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom.

The Word "Then" can be taken as an adverb of time and relates what follows to what has been said in the previous chapter. There in the previous chapter (Matthew 24), we find that at some point, the Lord comes in His Parousia and begins to judge His house (1 Peter 4:17), judging first among His servants. The faithful are set aside to a greater walk with God while the irredeemably unfaithful are appointed their portion with the hypocrites.

So, when He thus call some to a Higher walk with Him, He empowers them to go forth with the sound of the trumpet, calling men out of the failures and unfaithfulness of the visible church systems. Calling them to a closer walk with the Lord. Those who respond... so many will not respond because they would continue to do their own thing, going round and round and just concerning themselves with the milk, which milk doctrines are being taught in a perverted manner. While so many, a greater number will be doing their own thing; some will hear the sound of the trumpet and begin to turn to the Lord.

Of those who turn to the Lord, there will be two classes; and so verse 1 of Matthew 25 says Then (at that time) shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom.

Thus, the matter of the bridegroom's coming should be understood in the light of there being required from us, a deliberate going out to meet Him. He is coming and we must go to meet him. It is something that is supposed to be taking place on a daily basis. Even when the Rapture theory was preached two hundred years ago, the thought is that only Christians who are living overcoming lives will be caught up. Now, it has been watered down further to say anyone who just "accepts" Jesus Christ as his personal Lord and Saviour, who raises up his hand after listening to an evangelical delivery of the word, has immediately qualified to be caught up in the Rapture. May the Lord deliver us from mere fallacies.

So, we find that going to meet the bridegroom has a daily consequence as far as the believer is concerned. He is coming and we are going to meet him. We read verses 3 and 4 of Matthew 25

³They that were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them: ⁴But the wise took oil in their vessels (with their lamp). While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.

Remember, He says; watch therefore lest when he comes, he will find you sleeping. And yet the two classes of persons revealed here – the wise and the foolish, were found sleeping. The next verse says

⁶And at midnight, there was a cry made; Behold the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps.

That is where we will be stopping for now. But notice that this passage suggests a busy spiritual activity employed by those who intelligently understand the character of the work that the Lord is doing at the time of the end; fitting those who turn to him for the fullness of redemption. Remember Hebrews 9:28 says and unto them that look for him shall he appear a second time unto fullness of salvation. The Lord bless you, the Lord cause His face to shine upon you and do you good in Jesus name. Amen.

16

RAPTURE

DOCTRINE

EXAMINED

Glory, honour, power and majesty be continually ascribed unto the name of the living God. We know, by the Lord's promise and by His Spirit, that He is doing a great work in the midst of the church at this time of the end. And we trust that we all with an open face, beholding the glory of the Lord may be drawn more and more unto the same glory until we become like him in all things.

We will be continuing in our examination of the Rapture doctrine. In this edition, we will be drawing our meditation essentially from Matthew 25, the passage with which we ended the last one. We begin this way. The terms or phrases: "The Kingdom of heaven" and the "The kingdom of God" can be used interchangeably when the context so admits it. But, strictly speaking, the "Kingdom of God" is one thing, and the "Kingdom of heaven" is another; another of the same kind.

The kingdom of God has always been, even before the creation of man and it will always be even after the work of redemption has been completed. But the kingdom of heaven is something introduced into the kingdom of God for a specific purpose. Thus, the kingdom of heaven had a definite beginning. It was introduced with the appearing of the king, the Lord Jesus Christ in the days of his flesh.

The church in her time of preparation, which fits her for rulership with Christ in the age to come, is the kingdom of heaven. We can talk about the kingdom of heaven in its time of preparation and we can talk about the kingdom of heaven when it is inaugurated or installed.

Thus, the main distinction in the kingdom of heaven is that it is the ruling class of the kingdom of God in the coming age. One of the purposes for the church in this age is to build her up to exercise ruling function in that age. So, heaven is a people. A people thoroughly trained, tested and perfected for the age that is just about breaking upon us.

The first thirty verses of Matthew 25 covers two parables, both having a common introduction: the kingdom of heaven is as..." And, although that phrase is repeated in the fourteenth verse, you find that it is in italics, showing that it is seen and understood as relating to the first verse of Matthew 25

The two parables cover the two great aspects of the ministry of the church, and the ministry of individuals within the church. Of course, we pointed this out in the last meditation. One aspect of our ministry has to do with ministering to people, proclaiming Christ to the saved class with a view to making them desire to be more and more like him. And at the same time we receive ministries from others in the church. It also has to do with ministering to the unsaved class to bring them to the knowledge of Christ in salvation. All of these can be grouped together as the field ministry,

But what we do in service towards men is not however, what saves us. Paul says he takes diligence to watch over his own soul and to be a supplicant at the altar of grace, fellowshiping with the Lord, taking time to know him, lest having preached to others he himself should become a castaway, a reject (1 Corinthians 9:27).

So, there is this other aspect of our ministry that has to do with the one-to-God fellowship. We can call this the sanctuary ministry. Here, we minister to the Lord in His praise worship and adoration and are led by His Spirit into the study of his word. He keeps unveiling himself, manifesting His power, bringing us to full redemption. It will also involve the Lord opening our understanding in the medium of the written word to His person, His purpose, and His power.

Then, it contains this other aspect of being assisted by God, anointed by God to go into prayers, intercessions, supplication, first for self, and then for others of the Lord's people: reaching out unto God to enable us experience the things that He is showing to us in the secret. All these relate to the sanctuary ministry. And, in this connection, there is an all-important instruction: watch. It is in Mark 13 set forth as the porter's ministry.

Also, there is a ministry to others, something outward, something public. It is the field ministry. And there is the ministry to the Lord, the sanctuary ministry. And we said one of the great problems in Christendom is that even men and women called to His service burn themselves out in the field ministry to the utter exclusion of ministering to the Lord. And even when men come to the Lord in fellowship, it is that they might garner information, receive grace and ability to minister to men. But there must be a concentration upon the Lord. We must not be lost in the work of the Lord through loosing the Lord of the work. May the Lord help our understanding in Jesus name.

So, the aspect that covers our field ministry is revealed in the second parable from verse 14 of Matthew 25 to 30th verse, while that aspect that relates to the prophetic watch, coming into the blessed hope, coming to full union with Christ, being caught up to God and to His throne (Revelation 12:5) is discussed in the first thirteen verses.

With that background, let us now come to the meditation proper. We read from verse 1 of Matthew 25.

¹THEN shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom.

The first question is who are these ten virgins. And we answer; the ten virgins must be the prospective many-membered bride of Christ. We are told they go to meet the Bridegroom. And a little later, we are shown that the ready ones enter into the inner chamber for the marriage proper. So, at least, all should be agreed that these ten virgins speak of the prospective bridal class.

Then, the next question to be asked is when shall the kingdom of heaven become like or be made like unto ten virgins? Notice the very phrasing of the first part of verse 1, it begins with the word "THEN". And we are to understand that it is at a time when there is a spiritual movement, a movement of God's people out of the visible denominational church system seeking a greater walk with the Lord, yearning for full union with Christ.

In Matthew 22:2, we read that *the kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son*. Notice that the kingdom of heaven already had this characteristic at the time of the first advent of Christ. The Lord came to raise up a bride, a body of people that would be united with him in his divine glory and in the service of the Father's will. And in this parable in Matthew 22, we are shown that men and women from the unbelieving world are called to share in this heavenly glory. So, what we find in Matthew 22:2 is a characteristic of the kingdom of heaven that has always been there since the time of the first advent of Christ.

But, the situation in Matthew 25:1 is different. We are told, "Then (at that time) shall the kingdom of heaven become like unto ten virgins. Thus, we are shown that this characteristic of the kingdom of heaven is futuristic relative to the time the Lord was speaking the words. It was something that was to be at a future time.

So, although this parable had always been a blessing and a source of inspiration to the Lord's people all through the church age, it has a special message to the Lord's people living at the time of the end, more so, at the time of the Parousia. This is important. By the time we take the series of mediation on the Principal sign of His coming, we will be looking at that more closely.

We go to another question: what are the characteristics of these ten virgins? First of all, we have already noted that they must be saved persons, persons who are already saved and spirit-filled, who in their hearts yearn for more of God than what is available in the immediate environment of the denominational church systems.

There is a movement out of the visible church systems and a seeking after God for such fuller experiences that belong to redemption. So, the persons described already have this characteristic.

And remember, they are said to be virgins. They have virgin heart purity towards Christ. Compare that to spiritual harlotry, where the heart has gone a-whoring after the world, lusting after worldliness and materialism. So, these persons have virgin purity. And in Revelation 14 we are told that virgins are they who follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. So, there is a yearning for more of Christ.

The next question is: Of what consist this journey of the ten virgins to meet the Bridegroom. We answer that it must be a spiritual journey. It would involve moving from one estate in Him to a higher estate in Him. Remember here, it is said that they are going to meet the Bridegroom. Later in verse 6 we are told that the Lord is coming to meet them. This is quite important.

The Lord who is present with His people according to the promise of Matthew 28:20, is said to be coming. And that leads us to ask, what is the manner of the Lord's coming referred to here? Remember, this is the first time period of the Second Advent; the Parousia. During the Parousia, it is the intensification of his presence among His people that is the special characteristic. Through the ministry of the word and through the ministry of the Spirit, He comes more and more among His people. His presence becomes more and more felt by the discerning among His people.

In the early rain the things of our redemption were declared to us, and we saw Christ, as it were, from afar. But, in the latter rain, Christ is now ministering to us from a near presence. And some are already taking advantage of a greater knowledge of him to live in the abiding presence of Christ.

In verse 2, we are told concerning these ten virgins that *five of them were wise and five were foolish*. Now, many servants of God when they teach on this passage regard the fools, as those that are unsaved. But, from the first verse, it is clear that these are not just individuals who are not saved, but persons with great spiritual heart desire after God.

What then consist in their being foolish? We are told five were wise and five were foolish. What does the foolishness of these five virgins consist of? The next verse (Matthew 25:3) answers the question. It says, *those who are foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them*.

Oil in this passage is used to typify the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the accurate knowledge of Christ (Ephesians 1:17). There are three separate Greek words translated as wisdom in scriptures. In other words, there are three spheres in which God makes His wisdom known to His people. The first is described by the Greek word *Sophia*. It speaks of the critical faculty by means of which we are made to know the things of God. It is something revelational, God making Himself known to us in Christ. The knowledge so gained is wisdom, and is represented by the Greek word *Sophia*.

The next is '*sunesis*'. It speaks of understanding what is revealed. Here the mind is in view. There is a mental appreciation of the message of Christ revealing His saving purpose. The third one is *phronesis*. It talks about wisdom in practical matters, in daily affairs. It is about prudential dealings, a right application of what is understood and what is known of the Lord's mind to determine how life is to be lived on daily basis. In the closing verses of Isaiah 52, we are told that the Lord Jesus Christ will deal prudently. The reference is to the fact that He will employ great wisdom in the exercise of judgement (John 5:22). He will make Himself known to those whose hearts are perfect towards him. He will be able to know who to admit into favour, into certain privileges of the kingdom and who to shut away from these favours. He will deal prudently.

It is this third dimension of wisdom (prudence) that is the issue here in Matthew 25. In this connection we are told that five of these ten virgins were wise and five were foolish. So, the five who were wise were actually discrete. They conducted their daily affairs in the light of what they now know and understand of the Lord's will. The other five virgins were foolish. They were not fools, but they were foolish, stressing lack of application of self to what is already revealed and known of the Lord's will.

Thus, what is lacking is that the foolish picked and dropped the Spirit of consecration. There was no constancy of spirit. And what would have resulted from a constancy of spirit is the presence of oil in their vessels, the supply of the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the accurate knowledge of Christ. Remember in Ephesians 1:17, Paul was praying that the Ephesians' church should have such a grace. They were already saved, spirit-filled and walking to the best of their ability in the way of Christ, but Paul, seeing them and knowing how they are full of love for the Lord's people was asking this additional grace for them. We constantly need to pray this prayer for ourselves.

So, it is the Spirit of Wisdom and revelation in the accurate knowledge of Christ that is typified by oil here. Thus, the difference between the wise and foolish was not in their mental capacities but in the attitude to an understanding of what the Lord's will is. The five that were foolish did not apply themselves consistently and so were not possessed of the oil.

The words of the Lord Jesus in Luke 16:8 help to reinforce this observation. He said that *the children of this world were in their own generations wiser than the children of the kingdom*. From the context, we know that the wisdom in this connection refers to being shrewd, dealing prudently, knowing how to apply one's self and to plan out one's interest in a way that will ensure great gain.

For the children of this world, when they set their hearts upon a thing, they go all out to get it. They make plans and exercise themselves strenuously to execute their plans. They wake up early and go to bed late. They burn the midnight oil. They employ all soulical and physical powers they can muster, exploiting all opportunities sometimes even doing the seemingly impossible, to ensure they achieve desired results. The Lord says this is wisdom even though it is worldly.

However, in relation to pursuing the place of honour and glory in the kingdom, we do not always find the same wisdom revealed in the children of the kingdom. Here in Matthew 25, we are shown that this wisdom was lacking in five of these ten virgins who were on a spiritual journey to meet the bridegroom. May the Lord cause us to be wise indeed unto Salvation.

³They that were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels (with their lamp). .

The "vessel" here symbolises the believer's soul. Paul says "*but in a great house, there are many vessels, and some to honour and some to dishonour*" (2 Tim 2:20). We know that the great house in reference is the church.

So "vessel" symbolises the soul. For the foolish, there was no practical knowledge of consecration. While the light burns brilliantly, there was no difference between the foolish and the wise. It was when the light of God's Word was dim relative to the people that a difference emerged at the time of coming out of their sleep.

With that, we will take a straight reading again from verse one to verse six and we will make some other observations. Matthew 25:1-5

¹THEN shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom. ²And five of them were wise and five were foolish. ³They that were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them: ⁴But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. ⁵While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept

In the margin, it says, "While the bridegroom was taking his time". That of course is a characteristic of the activities of the Lord. There are seasons of refreshing granted unto the Lord's people and there are intervals between these seasons of refreshing allowing the church to live in the good of that which has already been given. Remember the wilderness journey, when the Ark of the Covenant moved forward because the cloudy pillar between the Cherubim lifts up; then the whole of the children of Israel moved forward. But at what time the pillar of cloud descends upon the mercy seat, it was indicative that they are to stop, put their tents in order and stay for a while. And we are told that they kept the charge of the Lord when the pillar of cloud tarried in the holiest of all.

The tarrying of the Bridegroom is characteristic of the Lord's dealing with us. He teaches us; He makes known to us His will. He allows time for us to internalise what He has revealed to us, and to cry out unto Him for the fulfilment in our lives the promised blessings.

But then we are told that while there was this tarrying, all the virgins slumbered and slept, both the wise and the foolish. And that is a critical point in the narration. As the light of the word burns brilliantly, there is freshness in the ministry of the word. Then the Lord opens to us more and more of the redemptive blessings in Him, and this keeps us awake. 1 Thessalonians 5 says, "They that sleep, sleep in the night (that is night relative to the things of God). But we are not in darkness as to allow that day come upon us unawares.

So, verse 5 of Matthew 25 says *and while the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept*, and in verse 6 we are told, *and at midnight there was a cry made behold the Bridegroom*. And we ask who made this cry? It is the faithful among the Lord's people.

The first parable in Matthew 25 emphasises a general characteristic of this specific class of God's people, that spiritual movement that seeks more of Christ. We are shown that there is a widespread tendency for slumber and sleep. However, here in the sixth verse we are told of some who do not go the way of others but keep watching. It is because they knew the divine schedule. And so, they were able to receive that fresh release, that fresh outpouring of the Lord's word and of His spirit and are able to announce a new day is come upon the church. And see how the announcement is given in verse 6, "*behold the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him*".

So, we have three classes here: the faithful class, the measurably wise class and the measurably foolish class. May the Lord assist us ever to keep on our devotions, holding on to the Lord, keeping track with all the promptings of the Spirit, responding to him, having an anointing of praise and worship upon our spirit. And as we share thus with Him in our closet, He keeps us in tune with whatever He is doing. Amos 3:7 say the Lord will do nothing but He revealeth His secrets unto His servants the prophets. The prophetic spirit is to come increasingly upon the Lord's people who walk faithfully with Him.

Then next the reaction: Verse 7 says *then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps*. Notice the relatedness between the burning of the lamps and the movement of the virgins. It is not just a passive thing to wait for the Bridegroom. It is something that requires us to seek the Lord diligently in the light of what is being declared to us in the ministry of the word. Those who seek the Lord have further understanding and know how these things relate to everyday life. So, they arose from their sleep, took their lamps and trimmed it.

Verse 8 says; *and the foolish said to the wise, give us of your oil, for our lamps are going out*. Note they did not say "give us oil" but "give us out of your oil". That is, exercise yourself in the things that you know, assist us, sit with us, teach us, enable us to have a practical entrance into the meaning of that sound, "behold the bridegroom". And of course the wise answered *Not so, lest there be not enough for us and you...*

The phrase "not so" is in italics showing that the translators, supposing to bring in clarity, added it. But it is not really needed. The wise were sympathetic. But they knew that they have lost out time when they slumbered and slept. In recovering themselves, they began to take out time to really seek the Lord, to wait upon the Lord. Thus, they told the foolish virgins, "if we tend to be unmindful of our present state and give you attention, there may

not be enough oil for you and for us. But go ye rather to the sellers and buy for yourselves".

There will come a time just when the glory is near to be revealed and the tokens are already being released, when the things the Lord will be unveiling are so great that men would be under pressure as though there is "time no longer." At that time every man will be more concerned for his own soul, wanting to make optimum use of the time left to make the kingdom honours his own. Right now there is still abundant help. We can easily find persons to share with us, to put us through, to spend hours with us in counselling and in prayers. The Lord is yet causing the things that had been taught us before to be retaught again. Things are yet moving on in a convenient pace we might say.

But things shall not continue to be like that. And it behoves us to make the best use of whatever opportunity the Lord is bringing our way now. The scripture says "the son that gathereth in summer is a wise son but he that sleepeth at harvest time causeth shame. May the Lord make us wise.

In another edition we will be able to look at the things the foolish are to do in order to be able to come into the possession of the Spirit of wisdom and revelation unto an accurate knowledge of Christ. But let's take an observation now. It is a lack of consecration that caused them not to have the oil in the first instance. And a return to the life of consecration is the way to buying or receiving the oil.

In the closing verses of the parable we are told that *while the foolish went to buy the bridegroom came, and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut*. So, the preparation for entering in with him unto the marriage is the readiness of heart and mind. They were ready, they had grown, and they had acquired more of the life of Christ inside of them. They that were ready went in with Him.

Finally, we are told that the door was shut against the foolish virgins. Thus, having a place in the ruling class of the kingdom of heaven is something to attain unto. And the opportunity is not always there. There comes a time when the door is shut.

We close with one more observation in the thirteenth verse. We are told as in summing up this parable, "watch therefore". So, the main purpose of this parable is to sound a call unto a life of constantly watching and holding unto the Lord. We are to seek an increase of the prophetic spirit. Not being over-involved in the affairs, of this life. Not lost in the work of the Lord while loosing the Lord of the work. Being mindful of this: that the Lord is well pleased in our becoming more like Him than in bringing the whole world to Christ. When we are like him in union of life, then the work of the harvest will become more fruitful, more satisfying to God.

We will be picking up again some of the things said in the concluding apart of this meditation in the next edition. May the Lord bless you in Jesus name.

17

RAPTURE

DOCTRINE

EXAMINED

We have been looking at the Rapture Doctrine, examining it in the light of the scriptures of truth. We are showing that the doctrine is false. And more importantly, it tends to be injurious to the Lord's people who now ought to be in a preparation for the fullness of the coming of the Son of God in glory and power.

It will be necessary to stress again that the Bible is of divine authorship. Over forty human writers were under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as they penned their message. Now, we know the Bible is almost entirely prophetic. The Bible is a book of prophecy. On the surface some books seem only historical, such books as 1 Samuel and II Samuel, I Kings and II Kings, and much of the record of the journeys of the children of Israel through the wilderness to the land of promise. These are apparently only historical. But several passages in the New Testament make us to see that even these historical records carry allegorical essence and have prophetic undertones.

Let's understand that the figurative expressions, spiritual symbols, and imageries are employed in setting forth the message of the word of God. And, of course, we should expect a consistency in the use of any prophetic symbol. Thus, in looking at how a particular writer of scripture uses a particular word, which has prophetic carriage, and looking again at how another, and yet another writer of scripture uses that same word, we expect to find a consistency. Thus, no prophecy of scriptures is of private interpretation (2 Peter 1:20). That is, you cannot interpret a prophecy of scriptures purely in the light of the witness of one writer; other writers must be consulted.

In the series of meditation on the Language of prophecy, we examined some of the words found in the language register of prophecy. We studied the usages of such words as heaven, earth, star, the sun, the beast etc. It was a preparation we were taking on in order

to be able to enter into the book of Revelation. A book on those series of mediation is already in print, and the interested reader can request for a copy. For our present purpose, it will be sufficient to draw our attention to a principle that is very useful in interpreting scriptures. Paul says in I Corinthians 2:9 – 13.

⁹But as it is written, 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. ¹⁰But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. ¹¹For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the Spirit of man, which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. ¹²Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit, which is of God, that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. ¹³Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

So, Paul shows us here a principle used in the interpretation of scriptures. He says in the words of the King James Version, "comparing spiritual things with spiritual". The Amplified Version of the Bible is more faithful to the Greek word translated as comparing. It says "comparing and interpreting spiritual truths by making reference to spiritual truths". So, truth interprets truth.

The meaning of this, in practical terms, is that when a writer of scriptures covers a subject matter, because he cannot give everything there is about that subject matter, the witnesses of other writers must be consulted. And in doing that, a fuller view of how God intends for us to understand that subject matter will then be before us. And we are saying all of these things in relation to the scriptures we have been examining, which scriptures are often used to teach the Rapture doctrine.

In the last edition, we examined Matthew 25. There, we found that at the time of the end, the kingdom of heaven shall become like unto ten virgins, which took their lamp and went out to meet the bridegroom. We saw as a prophetic indication, that at the closing period of the church age, during the time of the Parousia of Christ, there shall be a trooping out of believers who love the Lord from the visible denominational church systems, desiring more and more of the life and glory of the Lord.

From the very context of Matthew 25, it can be inferred that the movement of the virgins to meet the Bridegroom is a spiritual journey. It is not a sudden flight. He comes to meet us and we go to meet him. He comes to us in His word and His Spirit, and we go to meet Him as we make use of the things He shows us in our fellowship with Him. This coming is different from his appearing, his coming in the Epiphaneia, when he comes in His glorified estate, and the perfected church are associated with him in that glory.

We did mention in that meditation that we would touch on some few things that will lead to a fuller understanding of Matthew 25. We will be doing that in our meditation on "The Principal Sign of His Coming". The little we can do, for now, is to say again, that it was

indicated in that parable of the ten virgins that the door was shut. The kingdom of heaven is all about those who share rule with Christ in the age to come. Heaven, in this context, is a people, not merely a place.

There is, of course, the abode of God and of spirit angels, called heaven. But in the context of Matthew 25, the heaven is a reference to a people who share rule with Christ in the age to come. And we are told the door was shut. That shows to us that the opportunity to share with Christ in the rulership of the age to come does not last forever. Proverbs 27:24 says *For riches are not forever; and doth the crown endure to all generations?* The reference is to the riches of the divine nature, the crown of life, life in its highest expression, the immortal life.

The call for a people to share in the divine glory is given only to the church. The door of invitation and opportunity is opened to all that are called, that is, all believers in Christ Jesus (Revelation 4:1) until the end of the church age when that door is shut. And from the passage, it is revealed that not all believers (all that are called in this church age) will attain to it.

The understanding in certain quarters that the wise virgins are believers while the foolish virgins are unbelievers, certainly leads to error. This is because for one to be called a virgin, he or she must have been saved by grace, filled with the Holy Spirit and have a desire for full union with Christ. They must have left the Spiritual environment of the denominational church systems and must be opening up to the prophetic word concerning the Lord's coming.

The door was shut against the foolish virgins, not because they were not believers; not even because they do not love the Lord, but because they did not have the Spirit of discernment upon their hearts. They did not have the Spirit of understanding, having picked and dropped the call to consecration until there was no longer a working understanding of the truth of the kingdom of heaven.

So, that is the little bit we want to add, that the opportunity for rulership with Christ is open to all in this age. And, at the close of the age, all of the Lord's people who have not known God in overcoming grace will have to settle for a lesser inheritance than God intended. We may want to talk about the man-child company and the Bridal class (Revelation 12) in reference to believers who walked with the Lord in overcoming grace.

In this edition, we will be looking at John 14, being one of the scriptures used to teach the Rapture doctrine. We will be reading verses 1-3,15-19.21 –23. Follow the reading carefully.

¹LET NOT your heart be troubled: ye believer in God, believe also in me. ²In my Father's house are many mansion, if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. ³And 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. ¹⁵If ye love me, keep my commandments. ¹⁶And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter that he may abide with you forever. ¹⁷Even the Spirit of

truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him: for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. ¹⁸I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. ¹⁹Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more: but ye see me: because I live ye shall live also... ²¹He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. ²²Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord how is it that thou wouldest manifest thyself unto us, and not to the world? ²³Jesus answered and said unto him, if a man love me, he will keep my word: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

Now, the first thing we want to say is that there are nine distinct usages of the word "heaven" in scriptures. And the context in which the word is used in a given occasion, assist us to understand its meaning. But it is noteworthy that in all of these usages, the scripture does not make any effort to tell us how great and wonderful the heaven of God is...

Now, some suppose that Revelation 21:24 is a description of the heaven of God. But that can only bring a loss of the real interest. The passage describes the glory of the kingdom of heaven, the church perfected and glorified, raised up as a bride adorned for her husband, united with the Lord, her husband, in the service of God in the age to come. These spiritual realities are conveyed to us using physical but prophetic symbols. May the Lord give us understanding, in Jesus name.

We are saying, that the scripture does not make effort to tell us how glorious and wonderful the heaven of God is. The reason is because everything about the divine is ultra-excellent (if we may use that phrase). Even the body, the divine body which the Lord's people will put on when they come to fullness of life in him, radiates such excellent glory that it will be blinding for mortals to behold it. Remember the experience of Saul on the way to Damascus. He just had a vision of the Lord of glory, and it blinded him.

The things that belong to the heaven of God are exceedingly beautiful, wonderful, and extremely glorious. But that is not the subject matter in John 14.

Now, in order to get into the message on hand, we will first of all, read the passage (John 14:1-3) the way it is generally understood in the Christian world, bringing out the thoughts that were built into this passage by the traditions of men to sponsor or support the doctrine of the Rapture. So, we will be reading John 14: 1-3 again, but take note of the difference between what we shall read and what is given in the scripture.

We read, "let not your hearts be troubled, ye believe in God, believe also in me,. In my Father's house, which is heaven, are many separate compartments, which I may call mansions, for the very size of it, its beauty and grandeur. Well there are still some unfinished aspects of these mansions. I go to heaven to commission angelic contractors to put finishing touches to these mansions. And because I expect that several millions of persons will believe on me, there will be some new mansions, which will be constructed

in God's house, which is heaven. I go to prepare a place for you. And you should expect that when the construction work would have been over, I will come and take you back with me to heave, and you will be having the same mansion-type with me. That where I am, there you may be also"

This is how men will have us understand this passage. And so, we sing, "in my Father's house, there are many mansions there, in my Father's house above. Happy, happy, happy we shall be, in my Father's house above". And of course, all of these things are used to sponsor the teachings of the Rapture.

Now, let us go into this scripture, faithful to the word of God, trusting that the Holy Spirit will bring great enlightenment unto us. There are three words that need be examined closely in this passage in order to be able to come into the meaning of what the Lord was telling His people. The first is the Father's house, the meaning of the Father's "house" here. The second is "mansion", and the third is "place", "I go to prepare a place for you". Build around these three words is the Lord's teaching in this passage.

We ask, what is the Father's house? And we answer straightaway that the Father's house here referred to is not heaven. The Father's house, spiritually speaking is a body of people. If you will come with me to I Peter 2:4-5. It says *to whom coming as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious...* The reference is to the Lord Jesus Christ; He is a living stone, the chief corner stone, chosen of God and precious. And we keep coming to him as we have vital fellowship with Him. So we are told in the next verse

⁴Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

Therefore, what is true of the Lord Jesus Christ is true also of the believer in Him. Now, take note of the following thoughts drawn from the fifth verse. One, the house of the Lord is a spiritual house, made up of living stones, which word is used to symbolise the believers, persons who have known the Lord in Salvation and have been filled with the Holy Spirit, and are having fellowship with Christ.

Secondly, that spiritual house is a Priesthood. The reference is to sons of God suitably equipped to serve in the interest of God. So, the idea of God's people being a house to Him is closely associated with the service they fulfil amongst men in the interest of God. God's house is a body of serving sons.

We go next to Hebrew 3. Then we will find again that God's house is a people called to serve in the interest of God. Notice we have taken the witness of Peter and we want to examine the witness in the book of Hebrews. Earlier in John 14, we had seen the witness of John. We are doing all these things because the scriptures say, "In the mouth of two or three witnesses, let every word be confirmed". In these three witnesses, we will be able

to see very closely that there is a consistency in the way the word "the Father's house" is to be understood in scriptures. So, let us read Hebrews 3:1-6

¹WHEREFORE, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus; ²Who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house.

³For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who had builded the house hath more honour than the house. ⁴For every house is builded by some man, but he that builded all things is God. ⁵And Moses verily was faithful in all his house (the reference here is to the nation of Israel as a house unto God), as a servant, for a testimony of those things, which were to be spoken after. ⁶But Christ as a Son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.

That confirms the fact that the Father's house is a people, and Christ is the minister in that house, building it up, making it a house of light, and beaming forth the light of the gospel of peace to all nations. The Lord Jesus Christ, quoting from Isaiah 56:7 said in Matthew 21:13, it is written, *my house shall be called a house of Prayers* (unto all nations)

Another scriptures we may want to look at, from the witness of Paul, is 2 Timothy 2:20. It says "*in a great house* (and the Father's house which we are is a great house) *there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and earth, and some to honour and some to dishonour*". Here again, God's people are pictured as a great house and this is said in relation to service, in relation to the Lord's people being vessels of service unto Him.

Again, in a reference to the fact that a believer's body can be seen as a house, Jesus told the Jews, *destroy this temple, and I will raise it up in three days.* (John 2:9). Quite clearly, the Father's house is a body of people constituted to serve the interest of God. Service is in view in the word "house"

Then the next word we are going to look out is "mansion". The Lord said in John 14:1 "*In my Father's house are many mansions...*" The Greek word translated mansion here is "Mone". W. A. Vine, that great Bible Scholar, who himself believed in the Rapture doctrine but was faithful in the interpretation of this word, (mone), says in his dictionary of New Testament words says that there is nothing in the word *mone* to indicate several compartments in heaven or anywhere. So the word *mone* has nothing to do with physical apartments.

What then does the word translated as "mansion" as used here mean? First the word must be understood in relation to the word "house" because the mansion is inside the Father's house. Thus, whatever meaning it has can only be in the context in which it appears here. If as we have discovered, the Father's house is a body of people, a body of serving sons, the word translated mansion here should relate to the service of God's

people. Also, the word "place"; he says "*I go to prepare a place for you*" is limited by whatever understanding we have of the words "house" and "mansion".

Now the Greek word "mone" translated as mansion in John 14:1, ought to be translated "room" or abode. In the Father's house, there are many rooms or abodes; but those who translated the word "mansion" had this kind of thought at the back of their minds: "If we say in the Father's house which is in heaven there are many rooms or abodes, and each believer will be assigned a room, then for a man who has been living in a duplex " here on earth to be assigned a room in heaven is nothing exciting". So, they chose to put the right "abode" into verse 23 while leaving the word mansion in verse 1; but, it would have been more consistent to translate the word "mansion" or as "abode" or "room" in both verse 1 and 23.

The word "mone" means abode or room, a place to fill, a place to abide in the Father's house. The thoughts in this word of the Lord (John 14:1) is that the Father's house, this great house of serving sons, this house of priest and kings which the Father is raising up, of which He is the builder as well as the foundation stone, has many utility rooms within it in which different kind of services can be carried out. Putting it in a more practical way, in the Father's house, there are many realm of spiritual estate in which service may be done in His interest.

One level of service though may be equally important as other levels of services within the Father's house might be inferior to another in terms of serving the Lord's mind and purpose. So, in the Father's house, there are many realms in which the Lord's people can serve Him. Each of these realms has things about them (provisions within the room) that enable the individual standing in that capacity to serve God acceptably.

To, illustrate further, we will look at 1 Corinthians 12:4-6. Holding the figure of a house, remember that if you are in a house, you can talk about furniture and you can talk about other utilities within the room that enable the occupant to carry whatever service he wants to do there. The fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22,23 are adornments in all of these rooms, while the gifts of the Spirit (the nine gifts of the Spirit listed in 1 Corinthians 12:1-10) and the ministering gifts (the five fold ministerial gifts listed in Ephesians 4:11) are spiritual adornments that enable those who occupy these rooms to serve God in the power of the Spirit. Let us read 1Corinthians 12:4-6

⁴Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same spirit. ⁵And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. ⁶And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God, which worketh all in all

There are diversities of gifts but the same Spirit. These spiritual gifts when possessed by persons, who dedicate themselves and walk with the Lord in consecration, make possible the development of ministries. Coming to the estate of ministry is to become either an apostle, or a prophet or an evangelist or a shepherd or a teacher.

The spiritual gifts are by the Spirit, but the various offices (called administration in verse 5) are expressions of the office of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the great apostle, the Apostle of apostles. He is that great prophet God promised to send (Deuteronomy 18:15; John 1:21), He is the great Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, the great Evangelist who reaches a soul before any man can reach him. He is also the Teacher of teachers; the Adonai. So, the ministerial offices are part expressions of the office of the Lord. That is why we are told that there are differences of administration, but it is the same Lord.

Again, there are diversities of operations. Each ministry gift has the sphere of services marked out for him. For example, in the early church, James was a resident apostle. He did not travel out. Peter was a travelling ministry as much as Paul; but there was still some distinction. Peter ministered mainly to the Jews while Paul mainly to the gentiles. Thus, even in the same room such as the apostolic office, persons occupying the same sphere of service have distinct operations assigned them.

So, in John 14, the Lord Jesus Christ was talking about going to map out strategies for the proclamation of the gospel of the Kingdom. We are told in Ephesians 4:8 that *when HE ascended up on high, he led men who were hitherto captives to the flesh and captives to the world... He led them captive unto himself. Other translation says He led captivity in his train.* Then He gave back these captives of His as gifts to the church. The reference is to men and women that God had laid His hand upon, totally arrested for His use, and whom He has filled with His Spirit and grace to serve His will. These are given as ministry gifts to the church.

We are talking about the Lord mapping out strategies for the proclamation of the gospel of the Kingdom. That is the subject matter of John 14, 15, 16 and 17. The entire discourse, which was given after the Last Supper, among other things prepared the disciples for the work they were to do after his death and resurrection. In John 14:3, He says *If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself so that where I am, there you may be also...*

Not "where I shall be" as in a reference to Heaven or to His ministry from the invisible sphere of the heavens, but "where I am" presently in relation to the Father's plans and purpose, the position I occupy as the Son of God upon the earth, the great works that I do, the kind of entrance I have into the Father's mind and knowledge of His plans, that where I am, you may be also. He said in verse 12 of the same chapter, *verily, verily I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also and greater works than these shall he do, because I go to my father.*

The Lord was talking about lifting them up into a position where they can function as sons of God, where they can have the same relationship with the Father that they saw Him have, where they are able to do the same works and even greater works than they saw him do. This is the place in the Father's house where the Lord was talking about.

Yet the question may be asked "In what respect did He go and prepare a place for us?" It was in His going unto the Father. He had to die, be raised from the dead and be glorified

with the glory of the Father before his disciples will be able to enter into that place in the Father's house he had in mind for them. The disciples were to receive power (power to live as the sons of God, power to know the Father in an intimate manner, to know His will, His truth, His plans and power to be witnesses of the glory of the Son of God) when the Holy Spirit is come upon them (Acts 1:8). We are told in John 7: 39 that the Holy Spirit could not be given because Jesus was not yet glorified.

He had to be glorified first; He had to ascend to the realm of divinity and glory. "I go to prepare a place for you" he said, "*and if I go, I will come again, and receive you unto myself.*" The reference is not to the Epiphaneia, the coming of the person of the Lord Jesus Christ in glory. The coming again, in this sense is the coming of the Lord in the Holy Spirit.

So, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the exalted Christ, coming to carry out the work of Christ through the medium of such yielded vessels, such servants of God as are apprehended by the Lord Jesus Christ. By the Holy Spirit Baptism, He comes to us again and receives us to Himself, bringing us to that estate where we are more able to relate with Him and the things of the Kingdom.

Thus, let us read from verse 15 of John 14 and follow the reading carefully.

¹⁵If you love me, keep my commandments. ¹⁶And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another comforter that he may abide with you forever, ¹⁷Even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him, but ye know him, for he dwelleth with you and shall be in you.

The Lord came again to the disciples in the baptism of the Holy Spirit; but he came after he had completed the arrangements for the disciples to go forth with the gospel of the Kingdom and make disciples of all nations. We read on

¹⁸I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you.

I will not leave you comfortless; I will not leave you like orphans.. The reference is to the time period from His resurrection to His Second Advent; a period spanning about two thousand years. He is not going to leave us in those days as orphans, but He will come to us in the person and power of the Holy Spirit. Verse 19

¹⁹Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more, but ye see me because I live, ye shall live also.

We see Him in the working of His Spirit, in the Holy Spirit making Christ known to us in the revelation of His word and the unveiling of His power and glory. The world seeth him no more, but we see him and because he lives, we live also.

²⁰At that day, ye shall know that I am in the Father, and ye in me, and I in you.

This is not something to be known when we get to heaven, but something to be increasingly known and experienced here on earth. Verse 21

²¹He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him...

When He unveils or reveals Himself to us; we have wherewithal to serve Him. So, in verse 23, He says *If a man loves me, he will keep my words...* If a man loves me, he will keep my Logos. He will admit himself to the full range of my Logos, detailing the works of faith, the labours of love and the patience of hope. If a man loves me, he will keep my words...

²³... And my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him

So the word "mone" or "abode" or if you like "mansion", is in reference to what we become when the divine Spirit carries out a work within us. As we walk with the Lord faithfully, the divine one makes His abode in us, equipping and fitting us to become a temple of witness unto Him, and a habitation of God by His Spirit.

We shall take one more reading confirming what has been said, clarifying further, the meaning of having a place in the Father's house; with that, we shall close. Zechariah 3. There, Joshua, the high priest of the nation of Israel was shown clothed in filthy garments and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him in his ministry. The Lord had mercy on him, reached out to him and cleansed him of his iniquity, causing him to have a change of raiment. In verse 6-7 we are told

⁶And the angel of the LORD protested unto Joshua, saying, ⁷Thus saith the LORD of Hosts: if thou wilt walk in my ways (remember John14: 21,23 He that hath my commandments and keepeth them... If a man loves me, he will keep my words...) and if thou wilt keep my charge, then thou shalt also judge my house, and shalt also keep my courts, and I will give you places to walk among these that stand by

Thus, quite evidently, "places", "rooms", "abodes", "mansions" are positions of service and honour in the Father's house and it is as we learn to follow the Lord faithfully, faithful to His revealed will, faithful to all aspects of truth that have been revealed, that we find the Lord working in us by His Spirit, fitting us to serve the Father's interest even more faithfully.

May the Lord Bless you and keep you alive to His voice and to His will at this time of the end, in Jesus name, Amen.

18

RAPTURE DOCTRINE EXAMINED

We are continuing in our meditation on the Rapture doctrine, showing its fallacy and its evil, and then going ahead at the end of all these discussions to establish what the scriptures teaches on the true hopes of the believer; the hope of perfection and glorification which the Lord has marked out for the overcoming church.

If you will turn with me to 2 Thessalonians 2, we shall be taking the next passage in our examination of the Rapture doctrine. We will be looking at the first eight verses of this chapter in the light of what we find in Hebrews 10:25.

Now you will recall that the Rapture doctrine simply put, says that the Lord will descend from the heaven, the starry heavens, into the atmospheric heavens, that is the sky. Then Christians everywhere who have died, and supposedly still in the grave, will be raised up from their graves, in a quick flight to meet the Lord in the air; Christians who are remaining and love the Lord will be caught up with them in an instance of time (i.e. suddenly) in the clouds.

Then the full body: Christ and His people, will now move beyond the stars into the heavens of God, which is supposed to be located beyond the highest star; and when we get to heaven, each one of us is to be given a mansion in God's house. The first major activity after that will be the marriage to Jesus. Thereafter, for seven years, we will be combing the nooks and cranny of heaven, rejoicing, plucking fruits from the tree of life that grows in one street in heaven. There are not many streets in heaven but only one, the tree of life grows everywhere on that street, and we will pluck from its fruits and eat.

Thereafter, after we have satisfied ourselves with the splendour of heaven, there shall be a great gate opened from heaven, and right from beyond the starry sky, we will be looking at what is going on, on earth. It is said that after we have left the earth, there will be calamities, destruction, tribulations and the nations of mankind will kill themselves; and almost everyone, will be destroyed.

Then after seven years of rejoicing to see mankind, including those of our relations who have not known God destroyed in this way, we will now come from heaven. The Lord Jesus will sit on a white horse and we also will sit on horses, and with the sword, we will fight with those persons who are remaining on the earth and destroy them. Thereafter, it will be wedding reception on earth.

This is how the doctrine goes, and we will be showing that it is absurd. Even common reasoning will find a lot of contradictions in that scheme: getting wedded and after seven years you do the wedding reception on earth. Then we will rule over ourselves on the earth and then go back to heaven after a thousand years. Brethren, in understanding, let us be men. These are days God is teaching the church concerning what the true hopes of the church are so that faith coming to us in the environment of the revealed word will enable us to respond to God appropriately.

So, let us come to this passage, one of the several used to teach the Rapture doctrine. We have deliberately left 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17. We believe we will be picking that up at the end of these series of meditations. Again, 1 Corinthians 15 is another passage that we have deliberately left out. We will be looking at these passages after we have gathered enough insight from other scriptures that will assist a better appreciation of the things given us in those scriptures. Therefore, please turn to 2Thessalonians 2:1-8.

¹NOW we beseech you brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto Him, ²That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. ³Let no man deceive you by any means; for that day shall not come except there come a falling away first, and the man of sin be

revealed, the son of perdition. ⁴Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. ⁵Remember ye not, that when I was yet with you, I told you these things? ⁶And now you know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. ⁷For the mystery of iniquity doth already work; only he who now letteth will let, until he is taken out of the way. ⁸And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the Spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming.

Our first object is to show what this passage is not saying in order that we might be able to understand what the scripture is saying. Now, I will read again verse 1, showing how many in the visible church systems will have us understand it. This is the way it reads. "Now we beseech you brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our being caught up together unto Him"; that in essence is how they will have us understand this verse.

In order to have a clear understanding of what the apostle Paul was saying here, we are going to look closely at some words. It will be appropriate to have an entrance in to certain key words used here, for it is only in that light that we can understand this scripture. The first is the word "coming" as used in this passage "I beseech you by the coming of the Lord".

The word "coming" here is the Greek word "Parousia". Parousia means presence. Now if Paul wanted to show to the believers that the Rapture had not taken place as some suppose he was labouring to do in this passage, then all he needed to do was to tell the people "Ah, ah, don't you know I am still around, Peter is here, John is here, everyone is still around. If we have been caught up in the air, will you not know, for your seeing us is sure enough proof that the Rapture has not taken place".

That would have settled the matter if the coming of the Lord and our gathering together unto Him referred to in verse 1 were to mean the Rapture as brother Finis Dake and other preachers of the Rapture doctrine would have us believe. These are great men and we are not attempting to belittle them in any way, but we all must realise that in this hour, the Lord is making everything clear, putting all things straight. They might have stumbled in this doctrine in their days, because the time was not due for the church to enter into the fullness of the inheritance and so they had little light on the high calling, but we upon whom the end of the ages have come cannot afford to make the same mistakes.

Thus, if the word Parousia here were to be understood as Rapture, the argument Paul was making would have been totally unnecessary. Reading again from verse 2 of 2Thessalonians 2; it says

²That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or troubled neither by spirit...

The word "spirit" here is small letter is. Thus, it refers to prophecy, vision, dream, a word of wisdom, a word of knowledge and all such manifestations of the Spirit bringing a message to the people. So the phrase "by spirit" means by a word spoken by man as from God. Then he says

²...nor by word (that is by teachings nor by letters as from us (the apostles) as that the day of Christ is at hand (has already arrived)

If what the coming or Parousia means is "Rapture", then what we should be understanding from verse 2 is that "well the day of he rapture has arrived, the rapture has taken place and we are troubled because we have not been caught up". But, we must understand that the Parousia does no mean "Rapture". "Rapture" is a strange word only because it is assigned a meaning that is not found in scriptures

Thus, the first word of note there is "Parousia". We have said time and again that the word "Parousia" refers to the presence of the Lord, which the Lord communicates to His people at the commencement of His Second Advent. From Matthew 28:20 where the Lord told the disciples "Lo I am with you always even to the end of the age", we know that the Lord has always been present with His people, but in the appreciation of the Lord's people of His presence, there is so much ignorance.

He is present but we do not see Him, as we ought. Many times, we create things in our assemblies that suggest that we are looking at the Lord as someone that is outside. Hence, we make a temple, decorate it and when we pass by the temple, we bow our heads; but God does not dwell in temples made with hands, we are the temple of the Living God; you are the temple of the Living God.

So, what does it mean then if the word "Parousia" is "presence" and He has always been present with us? What is Paul then saying? Paul is saying there will be a great activity of the Lord Jesus Christ towards His people that will make us enjoy more and more of his presence so that it will be a journey from the state we are in now into the state where we are fully in fellowship with the Lord.

The Lord's presence will be so real and strong towards us. We are journeying from His presence into His presence. There will be a manifestation of the divine to the faithful among the Lord's people in an increasing manner, (Remember from Hebrews 9:28). The purpose is to prepare, perfect and glorify the faithful.

Now, how does the Lord show His presence in a way beyond how we have known it before? We answer that it is by His Word and by His Spirit. The word "rain" in spiritual parlance (that is, in scriptures) refer to the outpouring of the Spirit of understanding, of knowledge, of wisdom to the church, so that they will accurately know Jesus in actual

experiences. So, in Hosea 6:3, we are told that He will come to us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.

There is the early rain; there is the latter rain. The early rain is given by the Lord Jesus Christ (as we know it and experience it by the teaching of the Holy Spirit) to make us to know and experience the earnest of our inheritance, the down payment of our inheritance; we are restored as it were to all that Adam lost in the fall from glory to shame.

All that Adam lost is restored to us in the early rain of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, bringing us the fundamentals, the beginnings of the doctrine of Christ, showing us how to live above sin, to break free from the hold of sicknesses, walk in prosperity and peace, be saved from adversities, delivered from extraneous influences, evil attitudes, evil spirits. Learning to minister by Christ; learning to show God's saving compassion to man; growing in the things of the Spirit.

All of these are what is called the early rain teaching of the Spirit. The Lord comes and keeps coming in that rain to His people who have not known these graces.

Then, he comes again in the time of the perfection of the church not as the early rain but as the latter rain. Remember the latter rain is needed to ripen the fruit, the seed of which had been planted during the early rain. Now in our natural setting, in our world, farmers do not plant until after the first few rains. These rains are the early rains.

But, the rains given are not strong enough to bring the fruit to maturity, to a ripening stage. So, although there is rain in between these seasons of rain, (the early rain and the latter rain), towards the time the harvest is expected, the farmer must receive another measure of rain. That rain (the latter rain) is given to mature the fruit and to ripen it. This natural situation is being used by the Lord to teach us spiritual things.

So, there has been the early rain, and there is the latter rain. When he came in the early rain, we rejoiced and said, "The Lord has visited us". In every meeting, where the Lord's power, grace and glory show us the various blessings of redemption and we receive them, we have rejoiced and said God has visited His people.

The Lord comes to us in the teaching of God's Word and in the ministration of the Holy Spirit. To say there is a season called "Parousia" the great presence of the Lord revealed to those who are hungry for Him, is to say there will be more release of God's Word, more release of God's Spirit, a great outpouring of God's Spirit and God's Word that will mature the believers and bring them into fullness of life in Christ.

This is what the "Parousia" is all about; a time when the Lord Jesus Christ makes Himself more and more known to us, opening the scriptures to us as never before, the Holy Spirit leading us to appreciate more and more of the things He has prepared for us. This is the meaning of the "Parousia". He has always been with us, but we shall know His presence as never before, by His Word and by His Spirit.

Then next, Paul is saying to the people "we cannot say that the day of the Lord is already at hand". You may want to read verse 2 of 2 Thessalonians 2 from the amplified version of the Bible". The word "at hand" means "have already come", "has arrived"; but when we understand that there is a season called "Parousia" which is given to prepare us to receive His Epiphaneia", (the time when Christ comes in glory and we are found in His glory), then we shall understand what Paul is saying in 2 Thessalonians 2.

The question is to be asked, what was really troubling the people? If what they simply heard was that "the day of Christ is already here", "the Parousia is already here.", what then was troubling them? It is because the apostle had taught them that at such a time, when that season sets in, there would be great times of deep fellowship in the Word to profit all with the things that God is releasing to his ministers: the revelation of God's Word and the great operations of the Holy Spirit. So, they knew there would be a gathering together, so much the more as the believers, by God's Word and Spirit, see the day of glory approaching (Hebrews 10:25). The people were wondering whether they were not already losing out on the things the Lord had begun to do in the church.

That is the context, and it shows to us that there is a great connection between the Parousia and the gathering together of God's people unto Him (verses 1 and 2 of 2 Thessalonians 2); because there will be more meat, more food in God's house, more exciting revelation of the glory to come, the Lord's people will be mindful to gather together unto Him.

Brethren the Word of God is being revealed as never before. The Holy Spirit is doing a tremendous work in the fellowship meetings of all those who have broken free from the hold of the denominational church systems and are gathered together unto the Lord and are seeking His face. The gathering together after this manner shall increase as we see prophetically by the Spirit of God, the day of glory getting nearer and nearer. That is what Paul is saying here in 2 Thessalonians 2:1, 2.

The next thought we want to pick up is that we are told that the day of the Lord, the "Parousia" will not set in unless there comes a falling away first. What does Paul mean by a falling away? It refers to a time when quite a number of God's servants will be a shame to the gospel. That is the greater many of the leaders in the visible church system will be saying one thing and doing another. It will be a time when there will be so much of spiritual poverty in the church; when moral failure, the works of the flesh are prevalent in the midst of the assembly of God's people; when there are widespread abominations within the church systems, in places that were once holy unto the Lord. That is the falling away.

Of course, Paul tells us by the Spirit of prophecy in this same chapter and in many other scriptures that a major characteristic of this falling away is that there will be overdone respect for man, even leading to the worship of man in the stead of God. Men will occupy the place of Christ in His house; sitting over the throne of men's hearts, showing themselves to be God.

Let us come to verses 3 and 4. There is a son of perdition. This son is actually a many-membered person (body). We are told that this son of perdition will exalt himself so that He as God sitteth in the temple of God showing himself to be God. It is with great pain that we make this observation that there is evidence of much blindness in the midst of God's people. Can you imagine someone saved by grace just as you were, filled by the same Spirit and you have to kneel down before you talk to him? Men, who are servants of God, parade themselves with such airs that literally demand that people should worship them.

However, we know that it is when spirituality is low, when people have not the fear of God again in the church systems, that these things take place; when we see that abominations are everywhere present in what ought to be called holy places, (Matthew 24:15) we are told "let him that sees it flee for his life."

Yet we know that this work of the Spirit will intensify. He will open the window into the contradictions in the denominations and call out of these systems, the willing hearted. With a continuous going out of men and women from these systems, what we shall find in the denominational church systems will just be open treachery and shame.

If you are sincere with yourself and you have a mind for the glory of God, you will understand that things are really awful in many places; we are not talking about places where Jesus is not preached as Lord and Saviour, but places where the people have already known Jesus as Lord by virtue of the new birth and are baptised with the Holy Spirit. We are not talking about dead orthodoxy, sleeping dead churches, but churches we might rightly call Pentecostals!

We are seeing and witnessing such a great love for money, such terrible passions, that we know that the falling away is already there and is a sign that the day of the Parousia, the season of God making Himself greatly manifest to us in His Word and His Spirit is already upon us. These things, (His Word, His Spirit, the revelation of Christ, the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit in the latter rain) are given to us so that we can deliver ourselves from the contradictions and confusions in the visible church systems and seek the Lord and His true worship. For then, shall he, working in us, bring us to perfection. The Lord bless you in Jesus' name. Amen

19

RAPTURE DOCTRINE EXAMINED

IN LIKE MANNER

We are examining the rapture doctrine, as it is taught in the church world. Our approach is to look at bible passages that are often used to teach this doctrine. In this edition, we will be looking at yet another passage, (Acts 1:9-11). We will be showing that what is commonly taught, is not in harmony with the truth and its spirit. This will be the last scripture we will look at before proceeding to I Thessalonians 4.

Come with me to Acts 1:1-11. In order to get a proper flow of the thought, we will take the reading from verse 1.

¹THE FORMER treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began to do and teach. ²Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he, through the Holy Spirit had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen. ³To whom also he shew himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. ⁴And being assembled together with them, commanded then that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. ⁵For, John truly baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit, not many days hence. ⁶When they therefore were come together, they asked of him saying Lord wilt thou at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel? ⁷And he said unto them, it is not for you to know the times and the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. ⁸But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth. ⁹And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up and a cloud received him out of their sight. ¹⁰And while they looked steadfastly towards heaven as he went up, behold two men stood by them in white apparel; ¹¹Which also said, ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same

Jesus, which is taken up from you into haven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go to heaven.

Now, the first question we want to ask is this: In what manner did the disciples see Jesus go to heaven? We are told in verse 9 that he was taken up and a cloud received him out of their sight. Notice that the cloud here is singular; "a cloud received him out of their sight". Thus, it is not as some think that he was just going up until he entered into the skies and the clouds covered him up. No. We are told that a cloud received him out of their sight.

Now what is this cloud that received the Lord Jesus Christ so that he was no longer visible to the disciples? We answer by saying that clouds are often used in the scriptures to represent the presence of a divine being. Many times under the Old Testament, especially in His dealings with the children of Israel, God was shown to descend or appear to them in a cloud. (Exodus 34:5; Num. 11:25; 12:5 Exodus 16:10, 19:9 etc.)

We are told in Exodus 13:21 that the Lord went before the children of Israel in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of Fire by night. Again, I Corinthians 10:1 says "they were all under the cloud". Thus, clouds can represent a visible spiritual body with which the divine makes his presence known.

Secondly, clouds are used to represent servants of God (spirit and humans) in their capacity to serve divine interest. Psalm 104:3 says "He maketh the clouds His chariots." Isaiah 19:1 says "God rideth upon the clouds". In other words, he carries out all his activities through his messengers.

In Job 37:21, we are shown that God's servants are light bearers. The light of God is in the clouds. In Proverbs 3:20 we are told that the *clouds drop down dew*. According to Ecclesiastics 11:13, *if the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth*. The reference is to the rain of the word of God and of His Spirit released through the ministry of a servant of God. We are told in Zechariah 10:1 that when God is to pour out the rail of life, the rain of blessing, the rain of His Word and of His Spirit upon His people, He first of all makes bright clouds; He raises up men and women unto Himself, fills them with his Spirit, and by their ministry, they bring the rain of God upon His people. Thus, true servants of God are clouds with water (Jude 22).

In Acts 1:9; the cloud in question is a manifestation of the divine spirit. We are told that a cloud received Him out of their sight. In other words, at a point in the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ to the heaven of God, He dissolved the human body with which He had appeared to the disciples and communed with them and took on a spirit form, the form of a cloud. He took on that same spirit form he had before he became man, the same cloud of glory that had appeared to God's people all throughout the Old Testament era. It was the same cloud of the divine presence, that Shekinah glory that received Him out of their sight.

Now we have said in our meditation on the body of His glory that the Lord Jesus Christ was by resurrection made a life-giving spirit (I Corinthians 15:25). That is after his resurrection, he took on spirit nature; but, for the first forty days, he needed to appear to His disciples

The disciples had been greatly discouraged, shattered by the fact of His death. It was as if the declared purpose of His labour among them for three and a half years had been aborted. Moreover, the gospel concerning the messiah was to be founded upon the fact that He died for our sins and was raised from the dead (I Corinthians 15:12-18).

¹²Now if Jesus Christ be preached that he rose from the dead how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not raised: ¹⁴And if Christ be not raised, then is our preaching vain and your faith is also vain. ¹⁵Yea and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified that He raised up Christ whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. ¹⁶For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: ¹⁷And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. ¹⁸Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.

So, forgiveness of sin and deliverance from its power, deliverance from the power of death, the hope of coming into life with God through resurrection are all made possible to the human race through Christ's death and resurrection. If Christ were not raised from the dead there would have been no hope of life for mankind, both the ones that are physically alive and those already dead. Thus, there was a need for the disciples to know without any iota of doubt that Christ had risen and for this good news to be preached to all men through the ministry of these witnesses.

But since the Lord Jesus Christ had returned unto Spirit nature, there was no way the disciples could know assuredly that He has been raised from the dead except He shows Himself to them. The Lord of necessity had to appear to them. Thus, we are told that He showed himself alive to them by many infallible proofs, being seen of them, forty days. He also used the occasion to teach them, to open their understanding and to re-establish their faith in the kingdom of God.

Recall what we pointed out in the meditation on the body of his glory, The Lord Jesus Christ though present with them throughout the forty days was not visible for the greater part of the time. And when he made himself visible by appearing in human forms, it was for a little time. After He had fulfilled the purpose of that appearing, he will dissolve the visible human body with which he had appeared and take on his spirit body.

In addition, he did not just appear to them in one particular human form, neither did he appear with the human body that he had before his death (passion). Rather, the specific form with which he appeared was tailored to suit the given occasion. As we said earlier, the purpose of doing this was to impress upon the mind of the disciples the fact that He

is no longer human and they should not ascribe to him in His present glory any specific human form. Otherwise He could just have appeared in one human form.

Here in Acts 1, the Lord had just made the final appearance to the disciples and the time had come for Him to finally depart into the spirit realm, into the heavens of God, never to appear to them again in the forms he had been appearing in those forty days. And we are told that when he had finished speaking to them he was taken up.

And of course, we are not to suppose that the heaven of God is located somewhere in space above the skies. We normally say heaven is above. But the reference is to the fact that the heavenly life and glory are far above earthly (human) life and glory. We should realise that the heaven of God is not located in the material universe. Rather, the material universe is a part expression (a visible expression) of the vastness of the heaven of God. The heavens of God are all about us. In Him we live, move and have our being (Acts 17:28).

But the Lord in His departure into the Spirit world went up to give notice to the weak minds of the disciples that he is ascending to heaven. We are told that as he was taken up, he took on the form of a cloud, that same bright cloud that had always represented the presence of the Living God. And He was no longer visible to their sight.

Thus, we see very clearly that the Lord Jesus Christ ascended to heaven not as a man, but as a Spirit being, in a body of cloud. And we are told that he shall come in like manner. He went to heaven as a spirit being, and he shall come in like manner, as a Spirit being. This is why in many of the scriptures where the Second Advent of the Lord is mentioned; there is a reference to clouds. John says in Revelation 10:1

¹And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud; and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire.

Remember, we have said that the Lord Jesus Christ comes as the archangel, the chief messenger: 1Thessalonians 4:16. So this angel here is not just any angel but the Lord as the messenger of the covenant, the one that carries out all the Father's purpose in redemption. He comes clothed with a cloud.

Again in Revelation 14:14 he says,

¹⁴And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle.

In 1Thessalonians 4:17, inferring that we are to be caught up into the divine spirit nature, into the same glory of life that the Lord comes with. It is said, then we which *are alive and*

remain shall be caught up together with them in clouds. Daniel also says (in Daniel 7:13,14), I saw in the night visions, and behold, one like the son of man came with the clouds of heaven (a phrase describing persons that have taken on full spirit nature), and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom that all people, nations and languages should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.

So, the Lord comes as a Spirit being. And since he is a Spirit person and has come to His infinite glory, he would not need to take on human flesh again. Some say that when the Lord comes, he will come as a man and stand upon a certain mountain. He will be seen literally fighting against the nations riding upon a white horse.

We know that all of that comes from a misunderstanding of scriptures. How can Christ ride upon a white horse to fight in this modern world! Neither does he need any such thing to discipline the nations. Remember how He dealt with the nation of Egypt. The judgements of God were rolled out one after the other and at the end of the day, it was clear that the God of glory had visited Egypt and manifested his power. In a reference to his power to break down all oppositions, he says *I am the Lord God that brought you out of the land of Egypt; out of the house of bondage.*

God (and by that we mean the Logos for we are told in John 1:1 that the word was God) has ruled the world hundreds of thousands of years, ruling over his creation ever before recorded human history in the creation of Adam and Eve. He has been ruling the world in hundreds of thousands of years from the unseen realm. He does not need to be physically present in the earth as a man in order to take the kingdoms of this world unto himself.

He became flesh in the first advent, partaking in the human nature, for the purpose of death. And he can never be subjected to that limitation again. When He was a man, He was limited and could only be in one place at the same time; but now in His spirit glory, He can be everywhere present at the same time. He wields unlimited glory and power.

So, we are saying that the Lord Jesus Christ who was taken up as a Spirit being will come in like manner, as a Spirit being. In addition, what we have seen concerning the activities of the Lord among His people in his first advent are shadows of things that shall be fulfilled in a greater manner in the church world at the time of his Second Advent. In particular those activities of the Lord among the faithful remnant in those forty days after his resurrection are typical of the activities the Lord is to carry out among those of his people who respond to the voice of His words at the time of His Parousia.

Remember in those forty days, though invisible, the Lord as a Spirit being was present with the disciples, He taught them the matters of the kingdom, and He breathed upon them. He fully prepared them to receive the outpouring of the Spirit. He is going to come in the same manner. At the time of His Parousia, He is going to be present among His people though invisible. It will be a time of a great unveiling of the word revealing to God's people the greater matters of the kingdom. It will be a time of great release of His

presence among His people. He will bring the faithful to full union with Himself. These will possess the Holy Spirit in all fullness.

However, all these activities are to be known only by the faithful among God's people. This is why the prophet said in Isaiah 59:20 *And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob.* Just like the whole of the covenant community of God's people were ignorant of the Lord's presence and activities among the disciples during those forty days and continued in their religious activities unaware of what the Lord was doing, the church world, and by that we mean the unfaithful among the Lord's people, is to be ignorant of the activities of the Lord in the time of His Parousia.

His presence among His people at that time will be as a thief in the night. It will be a secret or hidden work. Matthew 24:39 *say and they knew not until the flood came.* So the Lord will be present among the faithful, He will reveal Himself and manifest himself to them in the power of His Word and Spirit until they are caught up into the same estate of glory that He is, even though the majority of the people will not be aware of what the Lord is doing.

In addition, we find that it was not all of the covenant community that saw the Lord ascends to heaven only a faithful remnant that witnessed that event. Majority of the Lord's people (the Jews) were attending to their religious activities and were unaware that anything of significance was taking place. And it is to those faithful remnants that the angels gave the promise that the Lord shall come in the manner they saw him go to heaven (Acts 1:10-11). Thus, we are shown clearly in the scriptures that it is not all of the Lord's people that shall have the honour of seeing the Lord as He is and associating with him in his second appearing.

Not all saw Him go and so not all will witness and partake of His Parousia and the fullness of life He gives at His Epiphaneia. Hebrews 9:28 says it is to them that look for Him, who exercise a deep longing and desire for full union with Him that He will appear to the second time, not as an offering for sin but as the Lord of glory, to bring them unto full salvation. Isaiah 33:14-17 show also that it is those among God's people who are living an overcoming life, who had submitted to his dealings as a refiner's fire and as fuller's soap at his Parousia, that will be granted the honour of seeing him in his beauty and glory at the time of His appearing.

So, the Lord is not to be seen visibly by the world, nor is He to be seen and associated with by all believers. The Bible says He dwells in a light, which no one can approach unto, whom no one hath seen nor can see (1 Timothy 6:16). It is only the faithful, the overcomers that will see Him as He is and associate with Him, they will be raised up into the same estate of life that He is. Then shall they see Him and associate with Him in His glory; for then it will be spirit to spirit, an association of divine beings

We close by asking and answering this question: if the world is not to see him visibly, and many in the church world are not to see him in the fleshly nature, then what meant by this

scriptures that says *behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him* (Revelation 1:7)?

Now, apart from the fact that clouds are used to represent the presence of God and also servants of God in His service, they (especially dark clouds) can also symbolise an impending judgement. We mentioned this in the message on the Parousia of Christ by referring to Matthew 26:59-66 where the Lord said that the generation of Jews that crucified him were to see the son of man sitting in the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven. And we said that the clouds of heaven there referred to the event of tribulation that was to come upon that nation.

So, clouds can be used to symbolise troublous events that are upon a people and there is consistency in this use, because it is from the dark clouds that floods are released upon the earth. We are shown from Matthew 24 and Luke 17 that the flood is a symbol of the great tribulation that are to come upon the world.

So, clouds can symbolise events of divine judgement. Other relevant scriptures that may be consulted in this regard are Genesis 9:14; 1 Kings 18:45; Ezekiel 38:16 and Joel 2:2. We know that the time of the Epiphaneia has this characteristic that it will be a day of clouds and thick darkness (Joel 2:2). It will be a dreadful day as the wrath of the Almighty is visited upon the ecclesiastical and political systems of this world.

The clouds, with which the Lord comes here in Revelation 1:7, refer primarily to the tribulation that shall come upon the world at the time of his appearing. This is evident from the words that follow in Revelation 1:7. When He comes with clouds and every sees Him, we are told that all kindred of the earth shall wail because of Him.

That brings us to a consideration of that phrase "every eye shall see him". What does this mean? The seeing here, as we said before, does not mean all the earth will see Jesus Christ visibly, coming in the physical clouds. Seeing here means coming into understanding, seeing with the eyes of the hearts (Ephesians 1:18). In the days of His flesh, Jesus spoke of some who hear but are not able to see into God's purpose or to perceive what the Lord was doing. He says *they seeing, see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand* (Matthew 13:13).

And here we are shown that it is the events of the tribulation that will awaken the consciousness of the world, including the careless professors of religion, to what the Lord is doing in the earth. Remember Matthew 24:39. They knew not until the flood came.

By the time God's great judgements begins to be revealed in the earth at the time of the Epiphaneia, it will be come clear to all of the human race that things are no longer the same, that the one that has the right to rule has already taken unto himself His great power and has begun to reign (Revelation 11:17). We are told that when the kindred of the earth thus see him, the result is that they will mourn because of Him.

Thus there is going to be a great cry of lamentation and woe among the human race in the days ahead. In the words of Zechariah 12:11-14, it shall be a great mourning, beginning with the Jews. The sheer weight of the judgements of God will cause all mankind to cry out for the Lord, as a man mourneth for his only begotten son. In fulfilment of the prophecy of Haggai 2:7, the Lord shall become the desire of all nations.

Right now the nations do not desire Him, but He shall shake both the heavens (the ecclesiastical kingdoms of this world) and the earth (the political kingdoms) the sea and the dry land. He shall shake all nations and the result of these terrible judgements, is that the whole of the human race will be turned to the Lord.

The seeing mentioned in Revelation 10:7 refer to spiritual sight, understanding, coming into an awareness of a reality. The human race shall see him as Lord, King, Redeemer, and Saviour. They shall see Him as the sovereign King, the only one worthy to rule in the affairs of men.

So, the reference is not to seeing the Lord physically. The only way in which the world is to have a visible sight of the glory of the Lord is by seeing him revealed in his people that have come to the fullness of His life. These are the members of His body, the Feet Company, the body through which He would carry out all of His activities in those days. These are the ones to reveal the beauty and glory of Christ to the nations. This is why the scriptures refer to the manifestation of the sons of God.

2 Thessalonians 1:7-10 bears this out very clearly. It says.

⁷And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels. ⁸In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction (all these are figurative ways of expressing the intensity of the divine judgments that shall visit the world at the time of the Epiphaneia) from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, (the next verse: verse is the verse of note. It says). ¹⁰When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.

Thus, He is to be seen and admired in his saints who have taken on the fullness of his life. The Epiphaneia will be the most glorious day for the faithful, the overcoming church (and of course, we are not talking of a day of twenty-four hours). But it will be a time of great darkness and gloom for the unfaithful and for the unbelieving world. May the Lord bless and keep you, in Jesus name.

20

RAPTURE DOCTRINE EXAMINED

In this edition, we will begin an examination of 1 Thessalonians 4; the principal text that is used to preach the rapture doctrine. We will take our reading from the thirteenth verse and we will read straight to the end of the chapter.

¹³But, 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. ¹⁴For if ye believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep with Jesus will God bring with him. ¹⁵For 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. ¹⁶For 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. ¹⁷Then 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. ¹⁸Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

We will like to look at a few questions that have bothered the hearts of the Lord's people all through the generations, both in Old Testament age and in this gospel age. People have been asking this kind of questions and since they have so much bearing upon our subject, we might as well take them.

The questions run thus: What happens when a man dies? Where are the dead? If a man dies, shall he live again? What is the condition of the dead? If the dead will be raised up, how are the dead raised up and with what body do they come? These questions are actually to be found in the scriptures in one form or the other; and it will be profitable to take some of the questions reading them out from the scriptures.

If we turn to Job 14, the 13th verse, we will find one of these several questions asked. It reads *If a man dies, shall he live again?* And then in I Corinthians 15, in the 35th verse, we find two of the several questions we have asked. I Corinthians 15:35 says *but some man would say How are the dead raised up and with what body do they come?*

Of course, since the scriptures provide answers to these questions we are armed with the knowledge of the true state of affairs with the dead and how the dead shall be raised. Remember our concern in this meditation is the believer in Christ. So let us answer the questions, which will lead us into the exposition of our set passage (I Thessalonians 4)

In the light of the scriptures, we are shown that when a person dies, the Spirit essence of the person ascends to God who made it while the body eventually turn to dust (remember that phrase: *dust thou are and unto dust shall thou return Genesis 3:19*) So, there is the destruction of the body after death; the body through decomposition returns to the dust from where it was taken, while the Spirit goes back to God.

In addition, we are told that at the point of death, there is a ceasation of all activities and consciousness. A dead man has no knowledge, no understanding and no remembrance whatsoever.

Now to the next question: When a man dies, shall he live again? For the believer, the hope of the resurrection from the dead is taught in both the Old Testament and New Testament scriptures. If this is so, then the next question comes to mind: how are the dead raised, and with what body do they come? This is quoting literally from I Corinthians 15:35.

We will be taking the second part of the question first: "With what body do they come?" Now, the two questions asked by Paul in I Corinthians 15:35 are answered in the verses following them; from verses 36-48. Paul's emphasis was on the second aspect of the question - *With what body do they come?* He tells us "the body that dies is not the body that shall be."

Remember we are talking about the believers now; the dead in Christ. Paul tells us that *there are bodies terrestrial and there are bodies celestial*. Terrestrial bodies speak of earthly humans, visible or physical bodies, made of dust, made of flesh and blood and adapted to life on earth in. Celestial bodies on the other hand are spiritual, invisible bodies, adapted to the life in the heavenly realm.

For the believer who is to inherit the Kingdom of heaven, we are told that it is not the body that was that shall be; that there is going to be a change from the human body to a spirit body. It's the body that shall be (the Spiritual body) that is taken up at the resurrection; this is important.

If we turn to 2 Corinthians 5, we see this truth clearly set out. We read verse 1. Paul says

¹For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Let us take the reading in a simpler form so as to bring out the meaning. "for we know that if our earthly human body which is now indwelt by our soul were dissolved in death, we have another body, another building, another dwelling place, This building is made of God, not made with hands. It is eternal in the heavens". So, here we find that the body that the believer will resurrect with is different from the body that is buried when he sleeps in Jesus.

The other part of the question is "how are the dead raised?" The dead are raised up by the voice of the Son of God. In John 5:25, we are told that *the hour is coming when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God and they that hear shall live*. So, there is a close connection between the voice of the Son of God and the resurrection of the dead.

In the passage quoted (John 5:25) the reference is to the raising up of persons who are physically alive but dead in trespasses and sins, raising them up from their spiritual death state to stand before God in newness of life. Ephesians 2:1 confirms this. It says *And ye hath he quickened, (or made alive) who were dead in trespasses and sins*. Verse 4 and 5 says *But God who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus*.

In verse 28 and 29 of John 5, we are shown that the same voice of the Son of God is to raise up from the dead all those who are physically dead and buried. So verse 28 and 29 reads thus:

²⁸Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming in the which all that are in the grave shall hear his voice, ²⁹And shall come forth...

The phrase "all that are in the grave" is used to represent persons that are physically dead. So there is distinguished between those that are physically alive but dead spiritually and those that are dead and are buried; but one common thing is that whether a man is physically alive but spiritually dead or physically dead, it is the same voice of the Son of God that raises the dead.

This again shows to us clearly that the trumpet that is to sound in I Thessalonians 4 and I Corinthians 15 is the sound of the voice of the Son of God as shown in Revelations 1:10. It has nothing, absolutely nothing to do with a physical trumpet.

The two things we have found in John 5 and I Corinthians 15, we can also see in Job 14, which we referred to earlier. We read verses 14 and 15 of Job 14 again. It says

¹⁴If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait until my change comes. ¹⁵Thou shall call and I will answer thee. Thou shall have a desire in the work of thy hands.

"Thou shall call and I will answer thee". So, it is by the voice of the Son of God that the dead are raised. Remember we are examining this subject only in relation to those who have entered into a covenant relationship with God, who have come to a righteous standing with God. When any such die, the body returns through corruption to the dust while the soul/spirit returns back to God.

The Bible teaches that at the point of death, the believer enters into a sleep. He stays in a waiting condition, not conscious of his environment. He knows nothing and remembers nothing, He is in a state of sleep; a complete state of inactivity. More about that will be said during the course of this meditation but, let us come quickly to 1 Thessalonians 4.

Now Rapture doctrine goes like this: the Lord Jesus Christ would descend from heaven, and stand somewhere mid-way between the earth and sky, some say he would just descend into the air, just visible to the earth, just below the sky. Then believers who are dead shall have their grave opened and in an upward flight will go to meet Jesus. Then we who are alive and remain will in the same instance of time be caught up together with them in the air.

A careful reading of 1 Thessalonians 4 will fault this understanding. When the believer is resurrected, does the process have anything to do with where he was buried? That is the question. Let us look at verse 14 of our passage

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

So, the dead in Christ come from the same realm that Jesus comes from. This is important. The dead in Christ is not coming from the earth, for he is not there. The body has returned to the dust and the body that shall be is a new creation all together. Thus, the resurrection of the dead has nothing to do with the grave where a man is buried. A significant number of people who die certainly have no graves. In any case we are not to suppose that God is bound to the dust from which the human body came in order to fashion out a resurrection body.

When the Lord comes, he comes with ten thousand of His saints (Jude 14). That is a prophetic way of saying he comes with his saints, the multitude of people who

have lived overcoming lives in the days of their flesh, who are awakened from their sleep to take on their spiritual bodies and be united with the Lord.

So, for persons who have lived overcoming Christian lives, living in hope of full union with Christ; from the day they die, their bodies returned to the dust while their souls and spirits are in divine keeping; but they have no conscious existence in the heavens of God.

Now, some suppose that when a believer dies, he enters into his reward and begins to enjoy the glories of the heavenly life. Then, at the time of resurrection, he comes to the earth and picks his body...etc. But we are shown very clearly that before the time of the Parousia or putting it more emphatically, before the time of the Epiphaneia, when the Lord comes in all of His glory, the believer who sleeps is having his soul and spirit in the presence of God, (meaning that the Lord has him in remembrance) but he himself is not conscious. This is a truth so clearly revealed in scriptures and the Word of God has no respect for our dreams and visions when they are in contradiction of it.

One of the most destructive doctrines that has made its way into the church is that when a person dies, he is more alive in death than when he was physically alive. This is a very fatal error. When the believer dies, he sleeps in Jesus, and the whole period of time from when the believer dies up till when he is raised up to glory in the Parousia or the Epiphaneia is like an evening gone in the sight of the Lord. We sing the song, but we do not know the principle involved when we say

Oh God our help in ages past

Our hope for years to come

Be thou our guide when life shall last

And our eternal home

Then one of the stanzas says

A thousand ages in thy sight

Are like an evening gone

Short as the watch that ends the night

Before the rising sun

In the realm of God there is timelessness. This is why he is the Ancient of days. There is a total arresting of time. All things remain in the exact form they were at the point of entry. So, the soul-spirit of the dead in Christ, all the graces that have

been acquired, all about the believer are in the presence of the Lord, but there is no consciousness until the resurrection body is taken.

So, returning to our passage, we will be reading again verse 14

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

When he comes, he comes with the saints. The graves are not going to be opened to cause something to rise up in an upward flight. It is not the body that shall be that is buried in the grave, neither is the building of God, our house which is from heaven, located underneath the earth. The body, which shall be, is spiritual.

With this observation, we can now read 1 Corinthians 15:35

³⁵But some man would say How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come? ³⁶Thou fool, that which thou soweth is not quickened (that is made alive) except it dies: ³⁷And that which thou sowest: thou sowest not the body that shall be, but bare grain, It may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: ³⁸But God giveth it a body as it has pleased him, and to every seed his own body

Let us go to verse 42. Paul having drawn his example from the physical world declares that as it is with the natural, so it is with the Spiritual. If you plant a seed of corn, you cannot harvest a mango fruit. What body that shall be given will depend on the seed sown. In us, the seed of eternal life has been sown in the preaching of Christ and the body will correspond to that image and likeness of Christ. And so in verse 42, Paul began to compare the physical body with the resurrected body that the believer shall take on. It says

⁴²So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption it is raised in incorruption. ⁴³It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; It is sown in weakness: it is raised in power; ⁴⁴It is sown a natural body: it is raised a spiritual body. ⁴⁵And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul, he last Adam was made a quickening spirit. ⁴⁶Howbeit, that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural and afterwards that which is spiritual (Take note of verses 47 and 48 very closely) ⁴⁷The first man is of the earth earthy (that is as to the substance of the body); the second man is the Lord from heaven. ⁴⁸As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy; and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly (Verse 49 is the verse of choice. It says) ⁴⁹And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.

You find that the resurrection body is what Paul calls our house; a building of God, eternal in the heavens. So, it is a spirit body that the believer in Christ Jesus shall

put on and he certainly has no need for the dust of the earth. We have said that when the Lord comes, he comes with his saints.

In closing, we ask the question "If the raising from the dead is not from the physical grave, then what does Paul mean when he says *the dead in Christ shall rise first*" To answer this question, we read again 1 Thessalonians 4:14, 15

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

The word "prevent" is not a proper translation of the Greek word used here. The right word is "precede". We who are alive shall not precede those that are asleep in entering into the glory of the resurrection. Rather, the dead in Christ shall rise first, and enter into the resurrection glory ahead of those of us that are alive. The fact that they are physically dead does not place them in a disadvantage in relation to those of us "alive and remaining". Rather, they will come first.

The rising here has nothing to do with coming out of the grave or a physical ascension, but being awakened into a realm of glory and honour in the Spirit. Remember in Ephesians 2, we are told that we are raised up at the time of our being born again to sit together with Christ in the heavenly places. Of course we know that we were not caught up to anywhere when we became born again, but there was a spiritual height we attained to.

The rising actually speaks of our entrance into the full glory of the resurrected life. In this regard, we are told that it is the dead in Christ that rises first. They enter into the glory ahead of others. This again demonstrates that there is no truth in the rapture doctrine, which says the dead in Christ will rise from the grave and at the same instance of time we will be, caught up with them. We are told that the dead in Christ rises first. Our rising together with them is not at the same instance of time.

We will be looking at this more closely in other editions. May the Lord really bless you and keep you in Jesus name. Amen

21

RAPTURE DOCTRINE EXAMINED

We will be going straight to our meditation. We have been looking at the rapture doctrine for some time now. Simply put, the rapture doctrine says that at some point in the immediate future, the Lord Jesus Christ will descend from heaven, which is supposed to be located beyond the stars, and will come down to the visible sphere just below the sky, blowing a trumpet with a loud sound.

One says that the trumpet that the Lord Jesus Christ will sound is being polished for about two thousand years now; that God has assigned an angel whose only duty is to be polishing the trumpet. The Lord Jesus Christ will take this trumpet to the mouth and blow a loud shout. Then the graves will open, and the dead in Christ who are supposed to still be in the grave, in an upward flight, will go to meet the Lord Jesus Christ in the air, just below the skies.

Then, we who are alive and remain till the sounding of the trumpet will be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air. Thereafter, the full body: Christ, the head and all persons that have been caught up to meet him will proceed in an upward journey beyond the sky to the heavens of God.

Then in the Lord's house, we will be given our one-room -apartment, which will be as big as the size of a mansion. Then, after the welcome ceremony, we will get married to the Lord Jesus Christ; and for seven years, the one thing we will be doing is getting acquainted with the expanse of heaven and occasionally looking down at the suffering masses on earth where our kits and kin who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ will be in great tribulation; and we will say "good for you; we preached Jesus to you but you did not believe".

That system of things will continue for about seven years while we will be visiting one another in heaven. Then at the end of the seven years, we will all come down

to the earth. If there are still some few remaining souls on the earth that have not been destroyed by the tribulation, then Christ will ride upon a white horse and we also riding upon horses, will get rid of these ones.

Thereafter, there will be the wedding reception of earth, and we will rule for a thousand years, Christ the king and we rulers with him. Ruling over whom? We do not know, but we are told that we shall reign with Christ a thousand years. Thereafter, we depart to heaven again, leaving the earth uninhabited, and there in heaven, we begin to enjoy the bliss of eternal life.

Of course, there are several shades of this simple outline, but all are to the same intent. People are very sentimental about this doctrine and many are agitated when it is being shown that the doctrine is not only false but dangerous also. It is counter productive in the sense that it prevents the Lord's people from seeing what the true hope of the church is; that blessed hope, the glorious inheritance

We as the Lord's people cannot take upon ourselves a lifestyle that accords with the teachings of scriptures, if things are kept so vague and people are not motivated. This is why you find that though sermons are preached that the rapture may take place today, yet in the same breathe, they say the end of all men is six feet below the ground.

So, though much lip service is still being given to the rapture doctrine in the visible church system, it no longer has that hold over the hearts and affections of the Lord's people as it used to. In its place are materialism and prosperity sermons that have become perversions because they are wrongly emphasised. We believe that the Lord is putting all things straight and that we as God's people will be quickened to see what the true hopes of the church are, so that we might stir up ourselves. Faith comes by hearing Christ preached in His word.

We will be going into the scriptures 1 Thessalonians 4, which is the most popular passage, used to preach the rapture doctrine. We will be reading from verse 13 to 16.

¹³But 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. ¹⁴For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. ¹⁵For 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. ¹⁶For 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 raise first.

In the last edition we asked a series of questions: what happens when a man dies? How are the dead raised? A consideration of these questions is very important. For example, when a believer dies now, we say he has gone to be with the Lord. And

such a statement is warranted, because it is in conformity with the scriptures. The Bible says very clearly that when a person dies, the body returns to the dust, but the spirit/soul of the man returns to God who made him. We are concentrating for the purpose of this meditation, on believers. So the Spirit/soul returns to the Lord, to be present with the Lord. He is held in everlasting remembrance before the Lord and remains in a state of inactivity, in a state of unconsciousness until the time of the resurrection.

Concerning the question how are the dead raised, and in what body do they come? From the teachings in 1 Corinthians 15 among many other scriptures, we say that the body that shall house our new creation man at the point of resurrection, is not this physical body which is said to be vile and corruptible (Philippians 3:21), but a spirit body. That being so, we showed in the last edition that verse 14 of 1 Thessalonians 4 is quite instructive. When Jesus comes, He brings with Him those of the saints that have slept.

We have already shown that there are three time periods associated with the Second Advent of Christ Parousia, the Epiphaneia, and the Basilea. The "Parousia means the time of the great presence of Christ among His people beyond what the church has known before. It is the first phase, and sets in at the time of the Second Advent of Christ. The purpose of the Parousia as we have earlier observed, is to prepare the church in a great and final work of Christ in the midst of His assemblies; to raise up a body of overcomers.

It is for the purpose of perfecting the church that the Parousia is given and for that glorious, full enjoyment of the Lord's presence. But it is in the Epiphaneia that the Lord comes in the fullness of His glory to be associated with by all of His own who have submitted to His dealing in the Parousia.

There is a sense in which all of these three time periods that are phases in the Second Advent of Christ (the Parousia, Epiphaneia and Basilea) can be called "Parousia", in as much as His presence with His people shall be so great with all limitations removed.

In the Garden of Eden, at the fall, Adam fled from the presence of God. Then the voice of the Lord God was heard walking in the garden in the cool of the day. And Adam fled from Him. But when His presence comes to the church in the same dimension as Adam knew before the fall, and even more, then they that look for him, that earnestly desire him, shall be caught up to the same realm in a change that comes to them.

That is something that belongs to the Epiphaneia, while the Basilea is the millennial reign of Christ, the time when the glorified Christ (head and body) shall rule over the nations of the earth shepherding them back to God.

Returning our minds to the 14th verse of 1 Thessalonians 4, we are told that when the Lord descends from heaven, them that are asleep in Him, will He bring together with Him. Since the believer is at death, already present with the Lord, and he is not coming for a body made with dust, there is therefore no connection between the Lord's coming and graves opening. There is not going to be the upward flight as we suppose which is a misinterpretation of this passage.

We take the fourteenth verse again.

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

He comes with ten thousand of his saints (Jude 14). That is a prophetic numbering of the multitude of His people that are saved who lived overcoming lives. When he comes, he comes with this cloud of people. This is important.

The view that graves will be opened at the coming of the Lord and saints that have died will take an upward flight, suggest that these saints are still in the grave. But we know, to be absent from this physical body, if in physical death, is to be present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5-8).

Perhaps it is supposed that when the trumpet sounds, the new creation man first of all goes to the grave, then picks up the body of dust and begin to ascend in an upward flight, then somewhere along the journey, he changes the body of dust for a spirit body. All that is very absurd. May the Lord help our understanding in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We come to the fifteenth verse. This verse introduces us to a key principle in understanding this passage. It says "For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord..." Thus what Paul is teaching here is revelatory, it is prophetic. The things that are to be revealed are rolled out in prophetic symbols, figurative language. And since scriptures interpret scriptures, by referring to other scriptures we will be able to have a clear understanding of this passage.

Now, in the fifteenth verse, he says those of us who are alive and remain unto the Parousia of the Lord shall not precede those that have slept. Again, we say that the word 'precede', means that we that remain unto the Parousia of Christ shall not attain to the fullness of the glory ahead of the dead in Christ. We shall have no advantage whatsoever merely because we are physically alive and remain of the number who received the Lordship of Jesus Christ over their lives in all material details. But they shall attain to the glory first. Thus, the word "prevent" actually means, "precede", to come ahead of. We shall not precede these ones in attaining into the full glory of the Son of God. They who have gone ahead of us will enter into glory first.

Then, we showed in the last edition that from the time of the death of a believer to the time of the resurrection is called a sleep. In the heavens of God, we enter into another time zone. Another way of putting it is that there is complete arresting of time. There is timelessness. There is neither day nor night; it is an eternal brightness in the heavens of God.

Thus, from the time Paul slept to the time of the resurrection, is the same semblance as when we slept yesterday and woke up this morning. This is important. When men die, they are no more active after their death than they were before. In fact there is a cessation of activities, there is neither knowledge nor understanding (Ecclesiastics 9:10). Until the time of the resurrection, absolutely nothing is remembered by the individual. The individual is in a state of unconsciousness. He awakes to the unlimited life and glory of the first resurrection if he had lived an overcoming life. So to the dead in Christ, it is just like sleeping in the evening of yesterday only to wake up into newness of life in the morning.

We come to the sixteenth verse. Referring to the characteristics of His ministry in the Parousia, it says *the Lord himself shall descend from heaven ...* From the Spirit realm the Lord descends in His word and by His spirit. The Lord's people are enlightened, they are taught, they are empowered, they are filled with His spirit and with His word. Their sights are opened to more and more fellowship with Christ.

It was a loss of fellowship at the fall. Adam and Eve were driven from the Garden of Eden; it was communion lost. In the fullness of our redemption, we shall come to fullness of union with Christ.

So, coming to 1 Thessalonians 4:16, we read again;

¹⁶For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God.

We saw earlier that the voice of the divine is regarded in prophetic scriptures as the sound of a trumpet. So, it is not a physical trumpet. The trumpet is the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the Angel (Messenger) of the covenant, as it will be manifested in many of His servants rising up with a new sound. In Revelation 1:10 John says

¹⁰I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet.

This voice that was like a trumpet sound was the voice of the Son of God. The effect of that voice is as the sound of a trumpet, arresting the attention of John.

In Paul's mention of the trumpet in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, allusion is made to Numbers 10 that tells us that the blowing of the trumpet is the ministry of God's word detailing things that belong to our redemption. In this connection, the reference is to the matter of the fullness of our redemption, that which is to bring us to perfection and fullness of life in Him.

So let us return to the sixteenth verse of I Thessalonians 4. We are saying that in the voice of the archangel, Christ is shown to be the Messenger of the covenant. He is the Servant of servants. He is the principal one that makes known the mind of the Father. It is when He speaks that all others can speak. The principle is there in Amos 3. The prophets and servants of God can only speak when the Lord Himself has spoken. So, it is the voice of the archangel, a ministry initiated by Christ, it is the trump of God declaring things in the mind of God for the full redemption of His people.

We will move a little bit into the seventeenth verse. But before we do that, we will show another absurdity in the rapture doctrine. We will read verse 17 and comment.

¹⁷Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air.

Let us try to understand this situation physically as it is set forth in the rapture doctrine. The word 'air' here in the Greek, and even in English usage, speaks of the lower atmosphere, where breathing is not impaired, where it is not difficult to breath. Now as we move up, the air becomes rarefied, so at a point, an individual will need oxygen to go further upward. Thus the word air is the lower atmosphere.

Now, if we will be meeting the Lord in the air, which is the lower atmosphere, then the physical picture is that we are caught up with them in the clouds (in the sky) to meet the Lord in the air. But that will amount to a contradiction, because, the sky is above the lower atmosphere here called air. Literally, we cannot be caught up in the cloudy sky and then meet in the lower atmosphere of the air, for that will mean coming down and not going up.

Now the word "the" in the phrase "in the clouds" is added there by the translators of the Bible. It is not there in the original and it does not make any sense whatsoever. Properly put, the scripture should read this way: "then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in clouds, to meet the Lord in the air".

In the remaining part of this edition, we shall be talking about what it means to be caught up together with them in clouds.

First, it indicates that there is going to be a change in our entire being. Cloud is a prophetic symbolism of a spirit being. Remember the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 1). As the apostles looked at the ascent of the Lord, we are told a cloud received him from their sight, not the cloud of the sky, but the cloud of a spiritual body. He dissolved the physical body with which He manifested Himself to them, and the same pillar of cloud that followed the children of Israel all through the forty years of their wilderness wanderings, that Shekinah glory, that Shekinah cloud, was the form the Lord took on when He ascended to the heaven of God.

So the word "cloud" implies we receive a change in our body Philippians 3:20,21 confirm that. It says,

²⁰For our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: ²¹Who shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself.

The word clouds indicate a change in our body and being. We shall be full spirit beings on account of that change. 1 Corinthians 15:52 says "*I shew you a mystery, we shall not all sleep but we shall all be changed... for flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven.*

The word cloud there is indicating that a change will occur. But by the time this is happening to believers that are physically alive and are living overcoming lives, the Epiphaneia would have set in. So, a change in nature from human to spirit is indicated.

Again, the clouds indicate that multitude of persons shall enter into this same experience at the same time. It shall be in clouds, in batches that men and women shall break free from the limitation of corruptibility and mortality into the incorruptibility of that changed life, becoming one with the Lord Jesus Christ in every respect. May the Lord cause you and I to be one "in that number", in Jesus name. Amen.

***RAPTURE
DOCTRINE
EXAMINED***

In the last two editions, we examined 1 Thessalonians 4. From what we have seen so far, it is clear to the discerning and we hope it is clear to all, that there is no reason to doubt whatsoever that the rapture doctrine is false. It is blinding, it is dangerous in as much it draws the attention of the Lord's people away from the true hopes. Even now, it can be said that the greater majority of God's people do not even know what the true hopes of the believer are. But we trust that as we go through this passage, whatever remains to come to a true and proper understanding of the things revealed will be graciously taught us by the Lord.

Come with me to 1 Thessalonians 4. We will be examining the thirteenth and fourteenth verse to start with. Our purpose in this meditation is to carry our examination of this passage a bit deeper. Verse 13 and 14 opens the subject matter of our meditation and set out the goals in the mind of the apostles as he penned the words that follows,

¹³But 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. ¹⁴For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

We showed in past discussions that when a man dies, he truly dies. He is no more active in death than when he was physically alive. The word "sleep" is only here used in relation to Christians. Since the hope of the resurrection is in them, they are said not to die but to sleep. Again, the death sentence that came upon all men through the sin of Adam (Romans 5:12; 1 Corinthians 15:21) has been taken away from the saints at the point of salvation (John 5:24).

Then, the second point is that the believer who sleeps in Jesus will be awakened from that sleep at the time of Jesus "Epiphaneia". We are told that God will bring with Jesus them that are asleep in Him. We saw that when a believer dies, the body returns to dust while God receives the spirit. Solomon says in Ecclesiastics 12:7 the Spirit returns back to God who gave it.

Thus, at the point of death it can be said that the believer is present with the Lord or has gone to be with the Lord, the meaning being that his spirit is with the Lord. In that condition, the believer is said to be asleep, unconscious of anything around him.

We pointed out that at the time of the Parousia, or more particularly, during the Epiphaneia, the believers who slept in the Lord, who had lived in the light of full union with Christ, are awakened from sleep, into fullness of life in the Spirit. In the coming of the Lord to lift us up into fullness of life, we are told that He brings with Him these saints that have risen into their glory. This is important. When Jesus comes, he will bring with him those that have slept. They will come together with Him.

Now that forecloses the impression given in the teaching of the rapture that we the graves will open and believers in Christ that are dead will rise up and take a flight to meet Jesus in the sky.

The next point made is that the body that shall be is not dust. When the Bible says in Genesis 2: 7 that God made man of the dust of the earth and breathed into him the breath of Life and man became a living soul, the reference is to his being fitted for earth dwelling.

However, from the authority of 1 Corinthians 15, we learn that for the believer in Christ Jesus, the body of the resurrection is not flesh and blood, for flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of heaven. Paul assures us of this in 1 Corinthians 15:50. So for the Spirit of man, upon being awakened from sleep to return to the earth, to the grave in which the body was buried, then turn its dust into human body is all very absurd.

Then the fourth thing we said is that it is erroneous to suppose that the Lord Jesus Christ will blow a physical trumpet. A divine being, a spirit being, by the virtue of the glory of His nature does not require physical assistance to get His voice to be heard. It is evident from Revelations 1:10 that the voice of the Son of God is as the voice of a trumpet.

So, the trumpet as used by Paul in this prophetic passage (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17) is an allusion to Numbers 10. It discourses the ordinance of the blowing of the trumpet. Also, from Isaiah 58 and other scriptures, we learnt that the trumpet signifies the ministry of the word of God in the power of the Spirit of God. It specially relates to the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus, a call to divinity of

persons redeemed from among men to be a kind of first fruits unto God involves a trumpet ministry.

That is the point we got to; we will be continuing from there. In the 16th verse of 1 Thessalonians 4, we are told, *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.* In the original the phrase "descend from heaven" appears last in this verse. So this is the way the verse will read if it is given a transliteration: "for the Lord in a commanding call or in a shout in the voice of the archangel, in a trump of God, will descend from heaven and the dead in Christ shall rise first". Now we move to verse 15 of 1 Thessalonians 4. It says

¹⁵For 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.

We have already observed that the phrase "the word of the Lord" means that what is to be revealed are given in prophetic language. The Word of the Lord gives the things and whatever message brought forth must be interpreted in the light of other scriptures. The word pictures given are of spiritual realities and not of physical things. Thus, it will be very inappropriate to understand this passage literally.

We showed in the last edition for example, that if we are going to be caught up in the cloud to meet the Lord In the air, then it will be an absurdity, because the air is the lower atmosphere round about us while the cloud is more identified with the sky. Since the sky and the cloud are above the air level, then it will be very absurd to be caught up in the physical clouds and to now descend again to meet the Lord in the air.

Then again, the word coming in the above verse is Parousia and ought to be translated presence rather than coming. "We which are alive and remain unto the Parousia of the Lord, shall not precede them that have slept". "Coming" indicates motion and mission. It shows the one being referred to as being on a journey, in a motion; but the word "presence" indicates rest, it indicates bearing, it indicates honour, it indicates authority and power. Thus, the word speaks of the presence of the Lord in the church in glory and power carrying out a work in her.

Of course we have already shown that the whole passage is to teach that those who sleep in Jesus are not lost, and that we that are alive and remaining will not be the first to enter into the glory but that they (the dead in Christ) will enter into the glory ahead of us. A little later, we shall show what happens when the dead in Christ rises first and the effect upon the waiting church; those who are said to be the "alive and remaining" ones

We come to the 16th verse. From there, we learn that it is the shout; it is the voice of the archangel and the trump of God that we are to interact with in the presence of Christ. We will recall that when the children of Israel were journeying through the wilderness, Balaam took up a prophecy, and one of the things he said was that "the shout of the king is among them" (Numbers 23:21). That speaks of the bearing, the power, the royalty and the majesty of a king being among the children of Israel.

The very presence of these spiritual realities helped them in all their conflicts through the wilderness and in the battles to possess the Promised Land. Within a few years, forty-two battles were fought and won, because the shout of the king was among them, the authority, power, glory and majesty of a king was in the midst of them. We are told, "In the word of the king, there is power". So, we are to understand that at the time of his descent from heaven, the Lord takes upon himself his great power and begins to exert the fullness of His saving influence upon the church to bring them to perfection.

Now, we want to show some similarities between the Genesis 3:8 and 1 Thessalonians 4:16. Lets see Genesis 3:8. The situation we find in that verse was a continuous thing. Let us read it and we comment thereafter.

⁸And they heard the voice of the Lord GOD walking in garden in the cool of the day; and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD amongst the trees of the garden.

Now, the question may be asked? Was that the first time the Lord was coming into the garden to have fellowship with Adam and Eve? We may put another question forward: what was the form of the Lord's visit to the garden? Did he appear in a visible human body and then talked with Adam? If he has been coming to Adam, then what was the form of the fellowship?

We can show that the Lord in His heaven did have fellowship with Adam by manifesting His presence. It is His presence here in Genesis 3:8 that was described as the "cool of the day". His presence was witnessed to by some changes in the environment of Adam.

Now, some suppose that "the cool of the day" refers to the evening period when the sun must have gone down, since that time period is more suited for relaxation; but a quick look at the things written in Genesis 2 will show to us that all of the earth as at then was in a temperate condition. There was nothing like scorching heat. In addition, the marginal translation of the phrase "in the cool of the day" actually means "in the wind of the day" (if your Bible has a margin you can check that out to convince yourself).

So, the divine presence was manifested in the gentle wind with which Adam was familiar. The voice sounding from the wind occasioned Adam's instruction and his

responses. That was the character of the fellowship Adam and Eve had with God. Remember also Elijah. He knew there are certain forms in which the Lord normally appears to his servants. He heard of the earthquake, the fire and the mighty rushing wind (all of which were used to manifest the presence of the Lord to His people under the Old Testament), but, the Lord was not in any of these; The Lord came in a still small voice

One of the manifestations of the Lord's presence is wind. Here (in Genesis 3:8), the whole setting is that of fellowship. So, the Lord came and kept coming to Adam. The water of life that came forth from His mouth prepared and empowered Adam to fulfil His mission. Remember the phrase in Genesis 2:10 "and a river went out of Eden to water the garden". That symbolises the supply system of God towards Adam in the place of Fellowship with God. For although Adam dwelt in a garden condition physically, the whole earth being in a likeness of a garden, it was the condition of His heart and soul at the time of creation that is the garden in reference.

So, we are emphasising just one thing: whereas in Genesis 3 the scriptures shows that the presence of the Lord was known in just two things, in the wind of the day and the voice from within the wind, that of 1 Thessalonians 4 contains a little more detail. We read in the verse that follow 1 Thessalonians 4:16 that the Lord is present not only to empower His people, but also to bring about a change in nature. The 17th verse says

¹⁷Then 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.

We saw in the last edition what the word "clouds" means. It indicates that a change of body takes place at this point. The believer puts "down" mortality and corruptibility and takes on incorruptibility, immortality and life (1 Corinthians 15:53). The phrase *to meet the Lord in the air* refer to fellowship, an association with the Lord on the Spirit plane; association of persons of the same kind, Spirit-to-Spirit.

We have said time and again, that God is lifting up some in the human race, the overcoming church particularly, from the human nature to the divine nature. Verse 4 of 2 Peter 1 says, "Whereby are given unto us, exceeding great and precious promises, that by these we might become partakers of the divine nature". So we are to partake of the divine nature. The divine nature consists of the divine life, which emphasises character, and the divine body, (which is a spirit body). The divine body will house our new creation man at the time of full resurrection.

There are two things that we need to emphasis as we begin to bring this message to a close. One, the phrase "caught up" in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 does not suggest

a change of physical location; it may or may not. For example, in 2 Corinthians 12, there was an experience Paul says that he had in the days of his flesh in which the same "caught up" was used. He says

¹IT IS not expedient for me doubtless to glory; I will come to visions and Revelations of the Lord

In other words, the experience Paul is about to describe has to do with visions and revelations of the Lord. In verse 2, he says

²I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago (whether in the body I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell. God knoweth;) such and one was caught up to the third heaven.

Paul, was physically present on the earth, but had an out-of-body experience. He was "caught up", but there was no change in nature. His new creation man was made to interact in the visions of God with the things that were brought before his mind; but in 1 Thessalonians 4, we shall not only interact with the Lord in the fullness of knowledge, there shall be a change of nature. We shall be like him in his spirit glory.

Now, we want to comment on that phrase which says we shall be "caught up together with them". The reference in the pronoun "them" is to the dead in Christ that are risen. Remember the purpose in 1 Thessalonians 4 was to show that those who are dead in Christ are not disadvantaged. That in fact, if they have lived overcoming lives, they will enter into the glory ahead of us who are alive and remaining.

Now, the question is to be asked, "what really happens when the dead in Christ are raised up from the dead and are brought into the glory of the resurrected nature, sharing with Christ in his divine essence? This is actually the subject matter in verse 17. when Paul, John and Peter, using these ones as examples, are awakened from their sleep and raised up into the fullness of their inheritance (unlimited glory and power), they will be ministering from beyond the veil. That is, they will be ministering from the Spirit realm to the church.

The effect upon the church as they minister under the headship of Christ is that there will be increased awareness of God's plans and purposes in the church, great changes, great lifting up. It will be more or less like the ministry of spirit angels, except that they will carry greater glory, power and honour, for they will be divine beings.

We are being shown that it is as the church receives their heavenly ministries and respond to the Lord, submitting to all the promptings and leadings of the Spirit in

our lives, that we are going to be caught up into the same estate of glory which they have already entered. That is very important.

At the hour of the descent of the Lord from heaven, there would be times of great spiritual encounters in the church. It would be a time of marked spiritual awakening for the faithful among the Lord's people. There will be increased activities of ministering spirits towards the church. And we are saying that apart from the general ministry of angels who ministers in a subordinate sense for the heirs of the great salvation, there will be the ministry of saints who have been raised up into their glory towards the church assisting her to come into the fullness of her inheritance.

And these spiritual activities will become more and more intensified as we approach the time of the Epiphaneia. From the time the descent of the Lord sets in and the Parousia of Christ is introduced, the dead in Christ (those who lived overcoming lives and have been judged worthy of sharing with Christ in His throne) begin to enter into their reward; each man in his own order. At the time the Epiphaneia is setting in, there is a myriad of divine beings coming with the Lord in ministry towards the overcoming church to lift her up into the same glory. 1 Thessalonians 4 says "*them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him and we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them.*"

That is the meaning of that phrase "together with them". It means "in cooperation with them", as we receive their ministries, which actually constitute the ministry of the Lord towards us,. If you will turn with me to Ephesians 2:4-6 you will find a similar usage of the phrase "together with"

⁴But God, who is rich mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us; ⁵Even when we are dead in sins hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) ⁶And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

You may be wondering why the word "together" appears again and again in this passage. For example, what does it mean for us to be quickened together with Christ, raised up together and made to sit together with Christ in heavenly places?

Now, let us, first of all, note what this passage is not saying in order that we might better understand what it is saying. We will all agree that Paul is not here saying that all believer were quickened, raised up from spiritual death, at the same time. This is evident because we did not all become born again at the same time. Our quickening took place at different times. Again, we know that there was no time when we were physically raised up into some heavenly places.

But we are told in this passage that He has raised us up and made us sit in heavenly places in Christ. So, the raising up must be spiritual and so also the heavenly

places. These heavenly places are realms of life, power, grace and glory in Christ, which we enter into on account of our being in Christ, knowing and walking with Him. At the point of coming to Christ in salvation, we experience a spiritual upgrading, an elevation. We were raised up and made to sit in the first of these heavenly places in Christ. And like we said, we did not all experience this upliftment at the same time.

Besides, all believers are not all seated in the same heavenly place in Christ. Some are seated in the first heaven while some are with Him in the second heaven, depending on our level of walk with Christ. So the word, "together with" (for it is one word in the Greek) does not mean the togetherness of the persons being raised as happening at the same time but the togetherness of the person being raised with the agency that makes that experience possible. Let this truth sink into you.

And what Paul is showing in this passage (Ephesians 2) is that all our growth in grace, and our entrances into the things God has prepared for us in redemption are received only in union with Christ. That is, as we fellowship with Christ, receive His word and submit to Him, we are made able to receive His life.

So the quickening together means that the quickening has been as a result of two things working together. He releases power and we co-operate with Him by accepting the power. Taking for example, the work of salvation, God does not just see somebody sitting somewhere and say "you are saved". No. it is under the testimony of the word of God that the person is positioned to receive the blessing. The word of God goes forth, he hears it and believes it, accepting it's testimony and receiving Christ into his life and the person is saved. And of course, the person is not saving himself but responding to the one who can save him.

The same is true with the baptism of the Holy Spirit. A person can be saved for twenty years but if he does not respond to the witness of God concerning the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the power and glory it brings into the believer's life, he would remain without that experience. In other words, he has limited his growth in Christ by his own prejudice against the baptism and activities of the indwelling Spirit.

That of course does not take him out of the kingdom but he remains perpetually seated with Christ only in the first heave, in the outer court. But then, there is a second heaven, which the baptism with the Holy Spirit together with life in the Spirit assists us to come into. And there is also a third heaven. If a believer receives the baptism of the Holy Spirit but does not yield to the workings of Christ in His life, he will not enjoy in actual experiences, the blessedness of sitting with Christ in the second heaven.

So the "together with Christ" means that our raising up is in co-operation with Christ. All our growth in grace will be as we respond to the Lord of grace. If Christ does not let out grace no amount of fasting and praying and exercise in the Spirit

will get us any experience in redemption. By the same token, if God should let out His grace and we are not receiving it, we cannot have an experience.

Thus, it is two-fold; a work done together. He lets out grace and we responding to that grace effectually enter into the experience. And so Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 6:1, receive not the grace of God in vain". A person cannot in idleness hope that spiritual increases would come to him. It is as he exercises himself in the Lord that the grace of the Lord becomes effectual in his life.

So, returning our minds back to 1 Thessalonians 4, we find that the phrase "together with them" means we shall be caught up into the same estate of glory, which they have already entered into only as we receive their ministries and submit to the same. At the time of the descent of the Lord, the dead in Christ are awakened and enter into their reward and ministries. And as they begin to exercise their ministries towards the Church, the divine presence becomes so strong in the midst of the Church. Just a little sincere effort at seeking the Lord and there is a tremendous release of help.

May the Lord help us to know that these are not ordinary days. Events of great proportions and eternal significance are taking place in the heavens, of which we cannot afford to be ignorant. The scriptures are being opened as never before. And this opening up of the plans and purpose of God in redemption is but a first step towards our being caught into the same glory.

There shall yet be mighty workings of the Spirit, divine visitations or appearances to the faithful. Such manifestation of the divine presence that will utterly change a man's spiritual focus, prepares him to receive the glory that is to be revealed. And it is as we see the Lord's glory and submit ourselves fully unto His voice that the Lord will bring us into great favours. If we continue to maintain this disposition, we receive to be accounted overcomers and are then judged worthy of divine honour. May the Lord keep us alive in Him to witness the days of glory ahead of us, in Jesus name.