

The Rapture and the Boy Who Cried Wolf – Part 3

Introduction:

1. Remember the story of the little boy who cried wolf? He cried, "Wolf!" when there was no wolf so many times that people stopped taking him seriously. When the wolf finally did show up, it was a disaster.
2. I believe that the evangelical community has cried wolf so many times in regards to the Rapture of the church that there has been a serious loss of integrity. Many people fail to take us seriously because of how many times we've cried wolf.
3. Here is how it works - a world event occurs and the church cries wolf. They say things like, "The end is near." "You better pack your bags because we are about to leave." "It's *'the signs of the times.'*" "The fig tree is budding." "It can't be long now."
4. This makes for good drama and sensationalism. It may sell books, it may work people up into hysteria, it may even guilt-trip some Christians to do what the preacher wants them to do for a little while, but in the long run it is destructive.
5. Let me provide two examples of this:
 - The book "88 Reasons Why the Rapture Could Be in 1988" - Edgar Whisenant
 - Brochure from church about the fig tree
6. I was thinking back through my years of ministry here at Crossroads and the different world events that led preachers and Christians to say that the end was near (Gulf War in 1990, Clinton's elections in 1992 and 1996, Israel's 50-year anniversary in 1998, Y2K in 2000, 911 in 2001, the war in Iraq in 2003, Obama's election). These are just a few.
7. I am so thankful that I have never jumped on the bandwagon of sensationalizing these events in an effort to get people to believe that the end of the world was near or the Rapture was sure to happen any day.
8. In this Bible Study, there are three biblical facts we will examine that would alleviate this foolishness and confusion if people would understand them.

First fact: We are living in the time of the mystery, not prophecy.

1. Your Bible can be broken into two major divisions - mystery and prophecy.
 - The subject of prophecy has been revealed by God to his prophets **since the world began. Luke 1:68-70; Acts 3:21, 24; 2 Peter 1:21**
 - In contrast to this, the mystery of the body of Christ was kept **secret** since the world began (**Romans 16:25**), and was **not made known** in other ages (**Ephesians 3:9**), was **hid** from ages and from generations (**Colossians 1:26**) until revealed to and through the apostle Paul (**Ephesians 3:3**).
2. It is amazing how many believers are ignorant as to these two distinct programs.
3. Who do these programs deal with?
 - Prophecy deals with Israel and their relationship to the Gentile nations. This distinction is seen throughout the Bible. Example: **Isaiah 2:1-5, 59:20-60:3**
 - The mystery is all about a new living organism that God has created called the body of Christ (**Ephesians 2:14-16**). In the mystery program there is absolutely no distinction between Jew and Gentile (**Galatians 3:28; Romans 10:12**). In the mystery program, God is not dealing with nations, but individuals.

4. God has two distinct ultimate purposes for these two programs:
 - The **earth** would involve the subject of **prophecy**, that is, Christ one day ruling and reigning over a visible kingdom on the literal earth in Jerusalem, with Israel as the head, and the nations of the earth subject to Christ and the nation of Israel. **Zechariah 8:20-23, 14:9, 16**
 - The **heaven** would involve the subject of the mystery, that is, a people whose citizenship is in heaven (**Philippians 3:20**), raised with Christ and seated in the heavenlies (**Ephesians 2:6**), and blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places (**Ephesians 1:3**).
5. When people fail to understand this great division of the Bible, they begin to do ludicrous things like set dates for the end of the present-day **mystery** program based on Scriptures and events in the **prophetic** program.
6. To tell the church that the Rapture could happen at any moment is absolutely right and should be reiterated. But to convince people that it **has** to occur soon based on a world event is subjective and very speculative.
7. People have been engaging in this kind of thing heavily for the past 60 years and we are still here and the Rapture has not occurred.
8. **There are no timetables** for when this mystery program called the dispensation of grace must end. Only God knows how long He will continue to extend this time of grace. It could be a day or a thousand years. God is under no time restraint.
 - Trying to look at world events and determine the timing or nearness of the Rapture is an exercise in utter futility. The church needs to quit doing this and focus on preaching the gospel of Christ with the time we **do** have.
9. On the other hand, there **are** timetables for the prophetic program which we will discuss in the next point.

Second fact: Signs of Christ's coming are for Israel, not the body of Christ.

1. In **Matthew 24:3**, the twelve ask Jesus a very pointed and direct question: "*...what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?*"
 - The word "sign" simply means "an indication."
2. So the twelve say, "Jesus, give us some indicators of when you are going to come and do away with this world system and replace it with your glorious kingdom."
3. Jesus does just this in verses 4-31. It will be an unprecedented time of:
 - Spiritual deception. vs. 5, 11, 23-26
 - War among nations. vs. 6-7
 - Geological disturbances and disasters. vs. 7
 - Persecution against Israel. vs. 9, 15-21
4. The good news of Christ's approaching kingdom will be proclaimed unto all nations (vs. 14), then there will be supernatural disturbances in the heavens (vs. 29), and Christ will return with power and great glory (vs. 30).
5. When Christ gets all done giving them these signs, He uses an illustration of a fig tree. vs. 32
 - A fig tree will begin to put forth its leaves and buds in late spring and may even yield a small crop of figs. But the main harvest time is in late summer.

- When a fig tree begins to put forth its leaves and buds appear, you know that winter is over, spring is here, and that summertime is near. The sign of the branches and leaves tell you where you are at in regards to the time of harvest.
 - If you are paying attention, then you know that harvest time is getting close.
 - Christ's coming and the end of the world is likened to harvest time.
- Matthew 13:39**
6. In verse 33, Jesus applies this illustration to their original question in verse 3.
 - When they begin to see the events (signs) of verses 4-31 unfold, they will know that His coming (summer or harvest time) is near, "*even at the doors.*"
 7. You will hear people say that when Israel became a nation in 1948, this was the proverbial budding of the fig tree, so we know the end is close. It has now been over 60 years, and the events in Matthew 24 have not taken place.
 8. **Matthew 24:32** has nothing to do with Israel gaining status as a nation. And anybody that attempts to set dates based on that assumption will fail.
 - One sidenote: The fig tree doesn't represent Israel nationally in the Bible. It is the vine tree that represents the national life of Israel. **Isaiah 5:1, 7**
 - The vine tree speaks of the fact that God has made Israel a nation in the earth, and when the life of Israel as a nation is considered, it is the vine tree, not fig tree.
 9. Jesus said, "*...This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.*"
 - What generation? The generation that sees the signs of Matthew 24 come to pass.
 10. How does this apply to us today living in the time of grace?
 11. Nowhere does your apostle (Paul) instruct you to look for signs in order to figure out the timing of the Rapture.
 12. Two of the last books Paul wrote were 1 and 2 Timothy. Paul mentions "*the latter times*" in **1 Timothy 4:1** and "*the last days*" in **2 Timothy 3:1**.
 - In both these passages, Paul gave general descriptions of what would characterize this world.
 - Any believer from the time the Romans sacked and destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70 until the present could look at these characteristics and see them ever present in their culture.
 13. When the Word of God was completed and Israel was judged and scattered in A.D. 70, we have, in essence, been living right on the precipice of the last days.
 - At any moment, this time of grace could end, and the last days in the prophetic program could commence and the events of Matthew 24 could unfold.
 - There are no signs for the Rapture and the end of this time of grace. God only gave us general characteristics that have been true of every generation in this time of grace.
 14. A person can look at world events in this time of grace and speculate whether they are a precursor to some of the events in Matthew 24, but that is exactly what it is - speculation!
 - People have been doing this for decades and even centuries, but we are still here.
 - The only way to know if a world event **today** is a precursor to something that will happen in the Tribulation will be **after** the fact. In other words, after the

Rapture you could look back and say, "Hey, that event was a foreshadowing of something in the prophetic program."

- There is no way to know that now. Those who are trying to "read the signs" and get people all worked up and convinced that the Rapture has to happen at any moment become like the boy who cried wolf. After a while, people stop listening.
 - The prophetic program gives definite world events and time tables, but the mystery program of today does not.
15. What should we do then? Quit trying to look for prophetic signs and take that energy and use it to proclaim the gospel of Christ while we still have time!

Third fact: The rapture is imminent and does not depend on signs.

1. What do we mean by the word "imminent?"
 - Webster's defines "imminent" as "ready to take place."
2. When we speak of the Rapture as being imminent, we are saying that there is nothing standing in the way of its occurrence. There are no signs that have to take place first.
3. In **Philippians 4:5** Paul admonishes believers, "*Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.*" What is the context of this?
4. Look back at **Philippians 3:20-21**. The context is the Rapture.
 - The word "look" carries the idea of expectation. If you are looking for it, then you are expecting it to happen.
 - "I don't know when it is going to happen, but I'm looking, watching, expecting, and anticipating it."
 - This is the attitude that we are to have towards the Rapture. **Titus 2:13**
5. Let's compare this to the Second Coming of Christ to earth, also called "The Revelation."
 - In **Acts 1:6** the twelve inquired after Jesus' resurrection if He would at that time restore Israel's kingdom. He answered "...*It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.*" **Acts 1:7**
 - In **Acts 1:9** Jesus ascends from earth to heaven and the twelve are gazing up into heaven, presumably wondering if He is coming back.
 - In **Acts 1:10** they are rebuked for looking up to heaven by the angel, and the angel assures them that Christ will return from heaven to earth as He ascended from earth to heaven.
6. But why shouldn't they have been looking up with expectancy? The answer is revealed in **Luke 21:25-28**.
7. Christ reveals specific signs that will occur before He returns to establish His kingdom on earth.
 - There will be unparalleled peculiarity in the solar system (sun, moon, and stars).
 - There will be unparalleled destruction and catastrophic events on the earth that will be worldwide, affecting all nations of the earth. It won't simply be a destructive event in an isolated section of the earth.
 - There will be unparalleled panic and fear across the earth.

- The powers of heaven will be shaken. cf. **Revelation 12:7-12; Luke 21:22** with **Isaiah 34:5** (His sword of vengeance is first bathed in heaven.)
8. The Bible says, "**And then** shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory." **Mark 13:26**
 9. Notice Jesus' instruction to His disciples in verse 28. He told them, "...when these things begin to come to pass, **then look up**, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh." **Luke 21:28**
 - So when were they to start looking up? Not until they saw the things happening that this text describes. There is a prophetic time schedule and the saints in the Tribulation will have the ability to know where they are in the time schedule.
 - When they see these signs, they are to start looking up because then Christ's coming will be imminent. Once the signs occur, then there will be nothing standing between them and Christ's coming to earth.
 - The Tribulation saints aren't to start looking up until the time schedule says, "It's time." Then start looking up.
 10. But in so many passages Paul is waiting, looking, and expecting Christ to come. **Philippians 3:20; Titus 2:13; Romans 8:23; 1 Corinthians 1:7; 1 Thessalonians 1:10**
 - If the Rapture of the body of Christ is not imminent, then what is Paul doing patiently waiting and looking for it? If many things have to happen **before** Jesus can return, then Paul looks kind of silly looking for it and anticipating it.
 11. What does this mean? It means there is nothing standing in the way of Christ coming for us, and the blessed hope taking place. There are no events that have to happen before He comes.
 12. This is what we mean by the imminent return of Christ and this is one reason why we believe in a Pretribulation Rapture of the church.

(Please scroll down to view timeline chart.)

SIGNS OF CHRIST'S RETURN TO EARTH

