

Christ's Last Word to His Church SERIES: Philadelphia: The Rapture According to Jesus Revelation 3:7-13

Jesus taught such a comforting, hope-filled message of His return to rescue His Church before the Tribulation, that His disciples went everywhere teaching this same truth. When Paul had only a month in a pagan city where he planted a church, the Rapture was central to their doctrine.

The Rapture was First Taught by Jesus

The Rapture is a doctrine started and taught by Jesus, continued and spread by His disciples, and believed and passionately lived out by His Church. The early church heard and understood this doctrine of Christ's any moment return, and radiantly lived, looking for ways to please Him when He came to rescue them.

James in the first NT letter said that Christ was standing at the door (5:7). The second NT book was I Thessalonians and every chapter shines with Rapture-induced hope-filled expectancy (1:9-10; 2:19-20; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:23). Paul's epistles start to finish, are seasoned with the flavor of a focused life awaiting Christ as in Philippians 3:20 where we as citizens of Heaven await Jesus eagerly, as Paul confesses in his last words of II Timothy 4 where he talks about His crown "at that day" when Jesus comes.

Peter says the same, going so far as asking what kind of lives should we live because we know the future (II Peter 3:11). John's Epistles are the same, in I John 3:2-3 he says that this "hope" causes us to purify our daily life looking for Christ's coming.

In Revelation 3:7, Jesus Christ identifies Himself to the Church at Philadelphia as the One who is True, Holy, and has the unstoppable Messianic Key of David. When Jesus speaks He tells the Truth. When we listen to Him and hear what He says we can have confident assurance that He knows what He is talking about.

Jesus Christ taught repeatedly (Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21) that His 2nd Coming is to Judge the ungodly. That was the content of every sermon on the future that He ever preached. Each sermon was taught in the context of Israel, was focused upon the Jews, and involved the city of Jerusalem and the nation of Israel.

The Rapture is Not The 2nd Coming

But, when Jesus spoke to believers His emphasis was different. Jesus taught His own born-again children of the faith, three bedrock truths about the Rapture or His coming for His Church.

These truths are that: the Rapture will be a source of comfort; the Rapture will be similar to the Ascension; and that the Rapture will be an intentional rescue.

Those truths, taught by Jesus Christ Himself, constitute the Biblical, doctrinal basis for all that the early church was later taught by the Apostles and which extends to us throughout all the centuries since Christ's ministry.

Three Foundational Truths: The Rapture Taught by Christ

Now, look in your Bibles with me at these three foundational truths that Jesus Himself taught, and that we are to hold in His Church today:

- **#1: Jesus said the Rapture will be a source of Comfort.** In John 14 Jesus promises that He is coming for us, and that coming is to take us to our place in His Father's House, that He has personally prepared for us.

John 14:1-3 (NKJV) "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, ***I will come again and receive you to Myself***; that where I am, there you may be also.

Jesus here makes the first and most powerful declaration of the blessed hope of every believer, across every century, in His Church.

- **#2: Jesus said the Rapture will be similar to His Ascension.** In Acts 1, Jesus tells us that He is coming back for us in the same way that He left His disciples as recorded in Luke 24: secretly, comfortingly, and raining blessings down upon us.

Luke 24:50-51 (NKJV) And He led them out as far as Bethany, and ***He lifted up His hands and blessed them***. 51 Now it came to pass, ***while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven***.

Acts 1:9-11 (NKJV) Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, ***He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight***. 10 And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, 11 who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? ***This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.***"

How did He go? Jesus ascended with outstretched and uplifted hands, blessing them as He rose out of sight. That is the same way He will return for His Church.

- **#3: Jesus said the Rapture will be an Intentional Rescue.** In Revelation 3, Jesus promises as the true One that He is coming back before the end of the world to keep us from the Tribulation.

When Jesus Christ introduces Himself in Revelation 3:7, He was explaining how He could offer us the blessed hope, one of the greatest, and most amazing promises ever made, to those precious and faithful saints. They, like us, lived in an uncertain world, and more than to any other church, Jesus explains His power in a way we all can grasp today. Hearing from Jesus:

The Blessed Hope Jesus Promised to His Own

The context of the Rapture according to Jesus comes after a series of titles we started looking at these past two weeks. Now look at the promised Rapture given to His Church by Jesus Christ the Truth, the Holy, the One who holds the key of David, who is unstoppable. Please listen as we hear His voice in Rev. 3:10-13:

*Revelation 3:10-13 (NKJV) Because you have kept My command to persevere, **I also will keep you** from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. 11 Behold, **I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.** 12 He who overcomes, **I will make him** a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. **I will write on him** the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And **I will write on him** My new name. 13 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

Remember Who Promised the Rapture

The last time Jesus introduces the Rapture, He does so in our text today. Always remember that Jesus never introduces Himself to these seven churches just by His Name, He always adds a definition of His Character, and a description of Himself.

Here in the Epistle to the Philadelphians (3:7-13), Jesus Christ introduces Himself by using a string of four Hebrew descriptions of God that if we meditate upon what they reveal, they are powerful, comforting, challenging, and inspiring. First note them with me in v.7:

Revelation 3:7 (NKJV) “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, “These things says: 1). He who is **holy**; 2). He who is **true**; 3). “He who **has the key of David**; 4). He who **opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens**”:

For a moment we need to pause our look at all the rest of this letter, and focus upon just these four descriptive titles Christ Jesus takes, and see the implications of each. First:

Jesus Christ is The Holy God

Jesus Christ Is Truth

Jesus Christ Is Holding the Key

Jesus Christ Is Unstoppable

Here is an amazing expression. What Jesus Christ opens can't be shut; and what Jesus Christ shuts,

can't be opened. To say it in our world it would be that when Jesus does something: that's it. It can't be stopped, thwarted, overturned, ruined, destroyed, or ended.

Jesus Christ told them that He had the Key of David, what He opens stays open, what he shuts stays shut. Jesus opens life, real life, eternal life, fully-satisfied life, and when He opens that life to you, nothing can separate that life from you or me. But there is another truth here:

Jesus Has The Key to The Blessed Hope

The promise Jesus Christ made as the unstoppable holder of the key is not just to that tiny church called Philadelphia. Across all the pages, of all the history, of all the true believers or Philadelphian-type saints, of all the churches from Pentecost to the last moment that Christ's Church is on this Earth: **Jesus has made an un-stoppable promise.**

Jesus summarizes and strengthens the same promise He gave in John 14, Luke 24, and Acts 1 by adding this powerful truth: He is coming to rescue His own children before He unleashes the demon hordes from the Pit.

Jesus gives every believer a blessed hope, that either He will come personally for them and escort them safely home at death; or that He will come to the sky above the Earth and call them to Himself, meeting them in the air and taking them to the room in His Father's House that He prepared for them.

Every true believer since the Upper Room has been given this blessed hope. It was not merely that Jesus Christ would keep tiny Philadelphia through the next quake, volcano, or disaster: this promise towers over far above just the AD 90's and casts its bright light all the way to the end of God's appointed time for Christ's church.

I, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy, True, Invincible, the Unstoppable, the All-Powerful, I will keep you from the Great Tribulation Hour that will come upon all the Earth. You will not have to endure the Tribulation.

How Does Jesus Describe the Tribulation He is Rescuing Us From?

As the end of the world approaches, so does earth's darkest hour.

Hell will open and the pit will vomit out its demon hordes to run wildly throughout humanity. Other beasts from the abyss will wreak death and destruction globally. And Satan himself invades the earth and conquers it all at last.

At the helm, the visible leader of the world will be the long promised man of sin, the lawless one, the beast, the Coming World Leader - commonly known as the Antichrist - who has 33 titles in the Old Testament and 13 in the New Testament. But behind him, the real power will be the god of this world, the dragon, old Lucifer, the lying serpent of Eden. Paul explains:

*2 Thessalonians 2:9 The coming of the lawless one is according to **the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders,***

During the Tribulation there are powerful, pervasive, and universal lies backed by the most believable signs and wonders ever witnessed on planet earth.

When Jesus came to earth He was God in human flesh. As the Christ He was the expression of all the promises of God. And to think that **the Christ** in all His grace and beauty came to earth, stayed for 30 plus years, was rejected as false and fake, and ***almost no one followed Him***, is bad enough.

But to know that Satan is going to send to earth the expression of all of mankind's desires in the person of the antichrist, and in a very short time ***almost all of the earth*** will follow him!

Is Christ's Promised 2nd Coming Literally True?

Jesus Christ will come again as Judge. He will set up His Kingdom as He promised. He will reign in this world. This is not a minor theme, a side show in the Scriptures: this is God's Plan at its greatest moment. This is Christ's high hour.

Beware of anyone telling you that the prophecies of God's Word aren't going to be literally fulfilled that are laid out. Remember that every Old Testament prophecy related to Jesus Christ's first coming was fulfilled literally.

- The Old Testament said He would be born of a virgin, Isaiah 7. He was.
- The Old Testament says He will be born in Bethlehem, Micah. He was.
- The Old Testament said again and again He would be a Son of David. He was and the genealogies are laid out in Matthew and Luke to prove it.
- The Old Testament said He would ride a donkey's colt to His mock coronation. And He did.
- The Old Testament said He'd be betrayed by a friend.
- The Old Testament said He would be stricken and His followers would be scattered.
- The Old Testament said He would be sold for 30 pieces of silver, and He was.
- The Old Testament even laid out the details of His crucifixion in Psalm 22. Everything.
- The Old Testament said that God would not allow His holy One to see corruption, He would come out of the grave, He would show Him the path of life, there would be a resurrection. Those were fulfilled with absolute precision historic accuracy.

So why would anyone ever think that prophecies related to the Second Coming are just some kind of mystery talk with no literal real fulfillment? When we read through Matthew, Mark, and Luke and John in the gospels, we read occasionally this statement, "That the Scripture might be fulfilled."

Jesus Keeps His Word

Jesus gave a sketch of history from AD30 to the Rapture in Mark 13.

Mark 13:5-13 basically says that all of history from Christ's time to the Final generation will be characterized by great difficulties, and larger and larger global problems. Throughout all the centuries there will be religious deception. There will be the disasters that are always brought about by nations fighting wars against each other. All through the centuries natural disasters will be always taking countless lives. Since

Christ's day warfare alone has ended millions upon millions of lives. One other truth Christ reminds us about is that there will always be varying degrees of persecution against true believers through all of this period of history, until the Lord returns.

But Jesus clearly changes gears from what will always be, into what will never have ever been before or after. That period is called the Great Tribulation. Jesus goes on to describe in mark 13:14-23 the last seven years of history.

Basically Jesus explains that everything that characterized the previous years, the war, the devastation, the disasters, the false religion and the persecution reaches never before or after seen: levels. Mark 13:19 clearly says, a time of Tribulation like the world has never seen before and never will again.

Jesus outlines all of human history from AD 30 to the end. He authoritatively declares that human history ends in a seven-year period called the Tribulation, the last half of it called the Great Tribulation. After that, verse 24 says, "The sun is darkened, the moon doesn't light because it draws its light from the sun. The stars fall out of heaven. The bodies in orbit are shaken out of their normal orbit. The universe goes black and then comes the Son of Man in power and great glory in the clouds." That is the Second Coming. But it is natural to ask:

Where is the Rapture in Revelation?

The Book of Revelation was given by Christ to His Church, they were the recipients, each of the seven got a copy. In this book we find Christ's overview of history from AD 90 to the end. A simple reading reveals that you have the church on earth in chapters 1, 2 and 3. You have the church in heaven in chapters 4 and 5 gathered around the throne.

How did the church get to heaven? The promised Rapture. In chapter 6 we see what happens next: on Earth all hell breaks loose in a series of seven sealed judgments. As each seal is broken, out comes a successive judgment.

Out of the seventh seal, toward the end of the seven-year period comes seven trumpet blasts, further judgments, more intense. Out of the seventh trumpet comes seven bowl judgments, dumped on the earth, rapid fire at the very end. From Revelation 6-19 all those judgments being poured out, then in chapter 19:11, Christ comes out of heaven.

In Revelation 20, Christ sets up His Kingdom for a thousand years, after which He puts down the rebellion by Satan and those born in the Kingdom who rejected Him, destroys the whole universe and creates the new heaven and the new earth. Jesus has laid out the Chronology simple, straightforward and with great authority.¹

The Rapture According to Jesus is Quite Different from the 2nd Coming

- At the Rapture, the church meets Christ in the air. At the Second Coming, Christ returns to earth with the church.
- At the Rapture, Mount of Olives is untouched. At the Second Coming, it is split.

¹ <http://www.gty.org/resources/Sermons/42-223#.To-d9XGazZk>

- At the Rapture, the earth remains the same. At the Second Coming, the earth is transformed.
- At the Rapture, living saints are translated. At the Second Coming, no saints are translated. They're simply taken into the Kingdom alive in their human form.
- At the Rapture, the world is not judged and sin gets worse. At the Second Coming, sin is judged and the world is far better.
- At the Rapture, the reign of Antichrist is triggered. At the Second Coming, the reign of Christ is triggered.
- At the Rapture, the body goes to heaven. At the Second Coming, it comes to earth.
- The Rapture is imminent, sign less. The Second Coming has distinct signs.
- The Rapture concerns only the saved. The Second Coming, the saved and the unsaved.

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Jesus again repeats the same promise He gave in John 14, Luke 24, and Acts 1: He is coming to rescue His own children before He unleashes the demon hordes from the Pit.

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And every time we celebrate Communion we are reminded that Jesus said, I am not drinking of this cup again until I get all of you safely home. The Rapture according to Jesus, remembered at each Lord's Supper.