

The End?

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Week 3, April 30, 2023

Christians should be more excited about the rapture because it is the moment you get a cloud lift and a face lift.

¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. (1 Thes 4-NIV)

⁵¹ Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—⁵² in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. (1 Cor 15-NIV)

When my kids were little, they loved to identify how much they were growing. We had a chart in the garage next to the entry to the house.

We wore out that pencil making markings. We wore that sheet rock through with markings. When I would come home from work, I would hear a little voice, “daddy, can we see how much I have grown? When I would return from some out of the country travels, “daddy, can I see how much I have grown?”

So off we go to the garage every time, take out tape measure, and mark, celebrate, and then I say, “you are growing so much, and you are so smart, pretty and love Jesus. Daddy is so proud of you.”

Kids are smart, and they often ask questions about everything. Like the one kid, not mine, who asked after being measured for growing, “daddy, why do big people stop growing?”

Dads have all kinds of answers to questions they cannot answer. Have you ever been their dad? My favorite, well, son/daughter, we are still growing. No, you are not, daddy. Don't try too fool me, I am smart.

You are right, I can see there is no fooling you, kiddo. Adults might stop **growing up**, but they don't stop **growing out**. Many adults have a nice dresser drawer, you know the middle drawer, which is always sticking out.

You are here today, I see you, because you do not want to stop growing. Way to go! God is so pleased with all of your efforts to grow up, outward and most of all inward.

In fact, this is one of the purposes of why Bethel Life Center exists. This is a value. To help grow your faith. To become a fully devoted followers of Jesus. To feel like Jesus. To think like Jesus. To love like Jesus. To act like Jesus.

And most of all, to look like you belong in heaven. Keep it up. Don't get lazy. You ask, how do I know if I am growing?

Do regularly spend your 15 minutes in a chair? Do have a place to serve in your local church? Are you attending a life group and building some deep and meaningful relationship? Are you consistently giving your talent and treasures to God? If the answer to these questions is yes, let's get a tape measure, mark on the wall in the garage, identify a mark showing you are growing. And then let's celebrate with ice cream.

Because every kid gets a reward for growing. Right. And every adult should get an award for growing too.

He was as princely as a prince could be. He searched in towns and villages to find his bride. You could see it on his face - determination, which was only surpassed by his love. A love waited to be accepted. A love waiting to be found.

Then one day, it happened, he finds his peasant bride. A more unique romance never occurred. His attraction to her was baffling. He, the stately prince. She, the common peasant girl.

She was plain. Flawed. Walked with a limp and one eye seemed a little off. He was perfect, she was plain. At times she slipped into periods sadness and crankiness.

Not the kind of soul you would expect to be with a prince.

According to the prince she was the SOUL that he could not live without. He proposed. On the dusty floor of her peasant cottage, he knelt, she smiled, he took her hand and asked her to be his bride.

The angels of heaven leaned in to hear her whisper, "Yes."
"I will return for you soon", he promised.
"I will be waiting, "she pledged.

Now, a prince leaving? Is that odd? No. He had princely duties to fulfill. He is after all the son of a king. Surely, he had Kingdom work to do. But Kingdom work did not crowd out the thoughts he had for his bride. His thoughts were always about her even while he worked. And about his return.

The prince talked about her often. What is odd, is not his departure, but her behavior in his absence. She forgot she was engaged.

You would think that her upcoming wedding was the only thing that she talked about to her friends. It isn't.

You would think that the wedding day would be her first thought and last prayer, but it isn't.

Some of her friends had not even heard of the prince. She has never described how wonderful he is. How kind and gracious.

Days have passed, even weeks-and his return isn't mentioned.

I am almost too embarrassed to tell you this next part. Maybe I should whisper. There have been times when she was found flirting and whispering with the village men.

This happened in the bright sun of the day, what is she doing in the dark of the night?

Has she fallen out of love? Is she rebellious? Need I even raise the question-**unfaithful?**

No, she might be only **forgetful**. You say that is no excuse. Why his return should be her every thought. How could a peasant forget her prince? Would a bride forget her groom?

This story is more than a fable, it is a story that is all too familiar. It is not a story about them, but rather a portrayal of us.

Question? Are we not the bride of Christ? Have we not been set apart for that day of his return? As a pure bride to one husband?

² For I am jealous for you with the jealousy of God himself. I promised you as a pure bride^[a] to one husband—Christ. (2 Cor. 11:2-NLT)

Has not God said to us, “I will make you my promised bride forever (Hosea 2:19-NCV)

Are we not mere peasants before a Holy and Great God? We, the sinful peasants, have heard the promise from our prince king. He entered our village, took our hand, and stole our hearts.

We don't always act like we are engaged, do we? Days pass and even weeks and we fail to mention the one who has captured our heart and healed our soul. Shockingly, some who know us best, know nothing of a prince that will come to get us. Are we rebellious? Maybe? Are we forgetful? Oh, for sure. Amnesic? To forget that we are engaged to Christ.

Perhaps today, the lover of your soul can light a fresh fire.

3 Benefits of the Rapture

1. Christ will rescue believers from danger!

¹⁰ Because you have kept^[a] my admonition^[b] to endure steadfastly,^[c] I will also keep you from the hour of testing that is about to come on the whole world to test those who live on the earth. (Rev 3:10-NET)

The reason you do not need to fear the end is because the rapture includes a rescue. The rapture includes a reunion with Christ. A reunion with loved ones.

A reunion with a new eternal body that never wears out. But it also involves a **rescue**.

Scripture predicts the coming of a time in the future of worldwide suffering. Not just in the middle east where women are brutally mistreated. Not just in countries of Africa ruled by warlords. Not just in places like China that torture dissidents.

Global. Worldwide. No discrimination. This period of time is called the Great Tribulation. The day of the Lord. A Time of Jacob's trouble.

Now, protection and rapture of Christians from these 7 years, does not mean that we are exempt from suffering, trials, persecution and temporary or lesser tribulation. *Jesus said, "in the world you will have tribulation. (John 16:33)*

In Acts 14:22, we learn that through many tribulations we must enter the Kingdom of God.

As it relates to the end times, the bible distinguishes between trials and tribulations and a time period of 7 years, called the Great Tribulation. Where God's wrath is poured out on the earth.

So, take comfort my friend, *God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thes 5:9)*

Probably the most asked question about salvation and the tribulation is, will people be saved during the tribulation? I would say, "Yes, there will be many opportunities."

2. Christ will awaken believers who are asleep!

⁵¹ *Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed. (1 Cor 15-NIV)* In the ancient orient, sleep was just a metaphor for death. The confusion for the Thessalonian Christians was, the deceased family and friends who are followers are with the Lord spiritually, but their bodies are physically asleep, in the ground or grave. Sleep is not the state of the believer in heaven, it is the state of the body in the ground.

In other words, sleep applies to bodies dead, and not to believers who are with the Lord. And the resurrection is the uniting of the believer in heaven with their body at the rapture.

The bible says, *“thus we are full of courage and prefer to be away from this body and at home with the Lord.”* (2 Cor 5:8-NET)

So, we are definitely not sleeping. We are at home with the Lord. Doing what? Bible study? Getting our rewards? Checking out or new homes? Getting a tour of the New Jerusalem? Having some hors d'oeuvres, before the Marriage supper of the Lamb. I am sure there will be plenty to do, and it will all have meaning.

3. Christ will remake believers with a new body!

⁵² in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. (1 Cor 15-NIV)

Why do I need a new body? Simply put. We are moving. We are relocating. We are going beyond this human reality. And the new location outside of earth's reality as we know it requires special equipment. Special places require special equipment.

Outer space requires a space suit and space transport. (Space suit). Under the ocean you need diving gear and underwater transport. (Diving suit). If you go into the Himalayas and climb over 20,000 ft you need special equipment. (Picture of Island Peak). Special gear like ice axes, crampons, harnesses and even at higher elevations oxygen. Special places require special gear.

Because these bodies are subject to disease, sickness, sin, and rebellion they do not qualify for the Kingdom of God. Another triad of reasons include decay. Decomposition and finally death.

All these types of human activity (sin) have been barred at heaven's door. All this type of human corruption is barred and banished from entering heaven. So, the question becomes how can these bodies ever be suited for that place? Paul's answer. **Resurrection.** Just as Jesus rose from the grave, so shall you.

God has a future that is much more glorious than what you are dragging around in your old tired and worn-out body. And if you are like me, you groan for something better. *For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.* ² *Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling,* (2 Cor 5-NIV)

Let's be honest, we are either **groaning** or we are **grandstanding**. Every day I look in the mirror, no grandstanding here, just groaning. I don't look in the mirror and say, "Oh, my goodness, I am just so amazing. What a specimen of humanity. Wow, what a hunk."

This is as good as it gets. No, quite the opposite. I am filled with sin. Racked with pain. And bloated with misconceptions of performance.

So, a transformation is a requirement for life beyond the grave. And that transformation will happen either by resurrection or rapture. Those are the two options. These next verses describe how this resurrection or rapture will take place.

⁵¹ *Behold! I tell you a mystery.* *Musterian* simply means something that was not previously known. Here is new information that has not been mentioned in the OT, but I am telling you now.

We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. There is the mystery, some believers in Jesus will never die. They will be raptured or harpooned-caught away violently is the Greek word.

The transformation includes the dead (those asleep) and living in the same moment harpadzo, caught up. Our perishable bodies must take on an imperishable form at some moment. You cannot take what you have as a body today, into tomorrow's heaven.

This is really good news. I don't want to look like this in heaven.

Imagine an old worn out human, wandering the streets of gold where God and perfection reigns and rules. That would be like putting this car (Justy) in a show room filled with Mercedes, BMW and Audis.

⁵² *in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.*

Some churches place this as a sign in their church nursery-we shall be changed. Paul takes us into the world of the nano-second.

Into the world of numbers that are so small they are indivisible. Let me define for a moment, twinkling and last trumpet. **Moment** is our English word, **atom**. It is something that cannot be divided. It is the shortest length of time.

Paul goes on further and describes an event that will be instantaneous as in the twinkling of an eye. What is a **twinkling of an eye**? That is about 1/30 of a second. That is fast! The twinkling of an eye is the time it takes light to go from the iris to the retina. And that has been calculated as 1/6 of a nano second. Not a second. Not a split second. Not a nano second, but a 1/6 of a nano second. In indivisible time you will be changed.

You not only get a supernatural body as we will see, but the exchange takes place in a supernatural timeframe. In a moment of time. Paul is using metrics of time to convey one message-this transformation or metamorphosis will not be a long-drawn-out time.

Our perishable bodies must take on an imperishable form, because of where we are going. And all of this will happen at the **last trumpet**. *For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.* (1 Cor 15)

When will this take place? This is not the end of the world trumpet. This is not the last trumpet in the book of Revelation. This is simply the last call of believers on the earth to announce that Jesus Christ is returning in the clouds.

Some living. Some dead. Caught up-harpodzo. Violently snatched away. Paul is giving a chronology. In a moment in time those who are dead will be raised up and those who are alive will be caught up to be with the Lord forever. *Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers and sisters,* (2 Thes 2-NIV)

At some point in the future the earth and sea will yield up all the dead, those who died or were cremated in fires, those drowned in oceans and eaten by wild beasts, those died by the sword, those who died in an atomic bomb, the decay of disease, strangling deaths, suicidal deaths, accidental deaths, nursing home deaths and every other possibility the grave will cough up the dead, and the ground and the grave will release deaths grip and up you go.

Christ comes down, and you go up!

All the atoms and all the molecules of all the decomposed believers will arise and you will experience an instant transformation that takes place through a new resurrected body, whether you are alive or dead at the moment.

This raises a question. **Why would God need to do this?** Why is the resurrection of the body such a big deal? Why don't we just go to heaven and wander around as spirits? Why not ghost-like living in an ethereal reality? Why is important that our bodies get raised?

(1) To reverse the effects of original sin. God said to Adam, *"in the day in which you eat, you will surely die."* (Gen 2:17) To me the real rescue is not from the tribulation, it is from the effects of sin. To reverse the impact of original sin, it requires a resurrection.

(2) The new heaven requires a new body. Special places require special equipment. The millennial earth. Your eternal heaven and home require a new body created by the hands of God.

You must have a resurrection to complete God's salvation plan and growth for your life and inhabit a new reality. Because death has been destroyed, you get a new future. A new home. And new body.

³⁷And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. ³⁸But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. (1 Cor 15-ESV)

Your burial is like the planting of a seed as the bible describes. Your grave is not a hole in the ground, it is a transition portal. The cemetery is not a resting place, it is a transformation place.

We see death as the ultimate tragedy, God sees it as the ultimate triumph. You cannot look at a seed and even envision what the plant will look like. There is **continuity** between the seed and plant. There is **distinctiveness** between the seed and plant. There is **removal of depravity**. Your new body will be free from sin. Corruption. Dishonor. Weakness. All aspects of our current body, all removed in our next body.

The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. (1 Cor 15:42-NKJV)

The body is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. (1 Cor 15:43-NKJV)

The body is sown in weakness, and it is raised in power. (1 Cor 15:43-NKJV)

What a future for you and your body in eternity. We are going from decaying bodies to incorruptible bodies. We go from weak bodies to strong bodies. We go from sinful bodies to glorified bodies.

You will not receive a different body only; you will receive a remade body. Just as God can make an oak out of a kernel and a tulip out of a bulb. God can make a new body out of an old one.

Now, your body will not be a clone of this body. It will be the same, but different. Jesus ate with disciples after his resurrection. They recognized Jesus. He walked straight through walls. And we will be doing much more! And so will you.

On the Mt of Transfiguration, when Jesus, Moses and Elijah had a board meeting, the disciples saw Moses and Elijah as they were on the earth, years before.

So, what do we know about the resurrected body of Jesus? It was nothing like what this world has ever seen. What do we know about our resurrected bodies?

They will be nothing like what we ever imagine. One day your body and soul will reunite after your death and instantaneous at the sound of the last trumpet and in a 1/6 of a non-second you will be like Jesus Christ.

Father,

Thank you that death has been swallowed up in victory through Jesus Christ atoning death. I want to be ready for Jesus' return. Today for the first time, or for a fresh time, I put my trust in Jesus' in Christ to run my life. I surrender to God's plan, I receive God's forgiveness of my sins, and I am dedicated to being God's servant until the day I die, or he takes me home by means of the rapture.

In Jesus Name, Amen.