

The End?

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Week 1, April 16, 2023

The next great event on God's calendar is the rapture of the church.

The word rapture means to seize, to snatch, to grasp, or the idea of a "catching away." Ok, let's read our text.

Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God^[a]; believe also in me.² My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. (John 14-NIV)

Jesus tells the disciples that I will come back and take you to be me, "that you also may be where I am." This rapture experience, limited to Christians, refers to Jesus Christ return to take Christ-followers to their eternal home.

Jesus guarantees his return, no matter how long it takes!

To their eternal dwelling place. We will be relocating and leaving a forwarding address of heaven as our new place of residence. A place that is safe. A place that is spacious. A place that is free of sin.

The rapture is the removal of the church from its activity on the earth. Baptists will disappear. Four Square churches will empty out. Assemblies of God churches will no longer need pastors who mow the lawn or pastors who fight with moles.

Or as Ira Stanfill says, "I've got a mansion, just over the hilltop in that bright land where we will never grow old. And someday yonder, will never more wander.

But walk the streets that are purest gold." Oh, in my research I noticed that Elvis has a version of this song also.

So, this is our theme for the next several weeks, leading up to Mother's Day. The imminent return of Jesus Christ. The next great event on the prophetic calendar of God, is the rapture of the church.

In the 1980's I was enrolled at Western Washington University, accumulating credits that would allow me to graduate with a degree in business. For those who do not know, I am an economist. My degree is in business administration, with a major in economics.

While in college, my 5th grade Sunday School teacher found out that I was in Bellingham, Washington, so he invited me to church and to his house for lunch afterward. Lunch would be great because they often served the leftovers from the week's school menu.

But church, that was rough. It had been several years since I had put any effort or work into my faith. To say I was a little out of practice was an understatement. As Keith Green says, "I had grown cold." My childhood faith was limited to Delta Baptist Church, in Everett, Washington, growing up.

So, worshipping in an Assemblies of God church, on 2014 C Street in Bellingham, a coastal community that was known for milling wood products, was a little out of my comfort zone. I survived the church experience and joined Bill and Roberta Ripley with their 2 adopted Vietnamese girls for lunch. Great food. Meaningful conversations to catch up from the past, filled the afternoon.

Suddenly, as if to flip a switch, Bill, and Roberta, in unison, started telling me about the signs of the times of Jesus return, ...the rapture of the church, the horror of the tribulation, the evil of the antichrist, the mark of the beast and the final conflict called the Battle of Armageddon.

All I could think of was giant horned creatures with ravenous teeth that would descend from the heavens and suck my eyeballs out, and then liquidate me, leaving me a greasy spot on the ground.

That was a lot to digest. My theological plate was suddenly overflowing, and my hosts did not ask if I wanted a second or third helping of additional end time theological food to eat, they just kept filling my plate. It would take me weeks to digest all of what I had eaten that day!

When I returned to my college dorm that afternoon, I was so shaken up. I needed a long nap. A good jog around campus. I decided I had to do some real thinking and investigation about the end times as spoken about in Matthew 24.

God used that Sunday lunch and end time theological stuffing (and spanking) to move this carnal and cold Baptist college student in the right direction toward reigniting a fresh faith in Christ. I was visibly shaken for several days.

During my Macro Economics class, I kept thinking and playing over and over the conversation on Sunday. While I shot hoops in the gym, I wondered if I was ready to meet God. As I walked to class each day, I had little concern for the upcoming test - but a lot of concerns about Jesus' return, and the rapture in particular.

That lunch conversation created a shaking. This weekend during my study for this sermon I pulled out of my memory archives the conversations with my Sunday School teacher, which are now over 4 decades old.

For a few minutes this weekend, I put my studies aside and thanked God for how that day began a shaking in me.

This weekend I was also directed to a verse that explains, why the shaking I experienced in college, and why the shaking many of you are experiencing in Kansas, is really happening.

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And like that 22-year-old backslidden Baptist in the 80's, working on a business degree, you better do a thorough bible study and ask yourself, are you ready for the return and rapture of Jesus Christ? Here is the verse, I alluded to earlier.

²⁶ At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens."^[e] (Hebrews 12-NIV)

The author of Hebrews tells us, there will come a time, **once more I will do a shaking**. And, in my opinion, a biblical opinion at that, God is doing some shaking even as we sit here today.

The Jewish Christians in Hebrews were experiencing all kinds of shakings, challenges, upheavals, and threats - causing them to be tempted to return to the lifestyle of legalism and works they had been set free from.

If these Jewish Christians returned to good works over grace, and merit over Christ's mercy, they would have likely faced little persecution. Experienced peace and safety. Their turmoil would have stopped if they had abandoned this new covenant in Christ, this new grace with God, this unlimited mercy with the Messiah Jesus.

So, the author of Hebrews must warn them, bad plan to go back to the Law. Bad program to reject Christ for Moses.

In chapter 12 of Hebrews the author introduces Jewish Christians and Kansas Christians to a shaking that is coming, once more.

This idea of once more, tells us that a time is coming when God is going to do some shaking. God is doing some shaking so those things that are not rooted in Christ, will be shaken. Will be toppled. Will be uprooted.

Throughout, these verses, God talks about this idea of shaking. A disturbance, quaking, teetering, convulsing, and rocking. These shakings are initiated and authored by God. These shakings originate in heaven and enter human history. Out of heaven and into earth divine shakings appear to rattle, rock, and disrupt the status quo.

God's purpose for these shakings is to disturb each person's (you and me) natural and normal order of activities. Our jobs. Our families. Our church life. Our marriages. Our 15 min, in a chair. Our worship patterns. Our schedule. Our pleasure. And our exercise routines.

God is at this very minute turning your plans, your programs, your dreams, and your disappointments on their head. He is turning all of it, right side up, and upside down.

As this shaking occurs, God tells us why this is happening. It is happening so God can get our attention. So, God can speak. So, God can be listened to. God wants us to stop listening to Tucker Carlson. Tanya Tucker. Chris Tucker. Even Forest Tucker.

And start to listen to him. We know that God speaks through his word. The author of Hebrews tells us that when God wants to speak and get our undivided attention, God speaks through some shakings, some disturbing's, or some rattling's.

And God's goal is to shake that which is not tethered to him. Which is not tied to him. Which is not trusted to him.

When God wanted to do a shaking in biblical history, get the people of God to return to their first love, to return to holiness, to return to their mission of evangelism, return to the promises and blessings that God has for his people, God would often do a shaking.

To do this, God would cause or allow a disturbance. A shaking.

1. In the time of Noah, God shook the heavens and flooded the earth, thus cleansing the world of evil that ran unchecked.

The flood engulfed the earth for 40 days. (Gen 7:17-NET)

2. At the walls of Jericho, God did a shaking, opening his people to new possibilities and promise.

²⁰ When the trumpets sounded, the army shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the men gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so everyone charged straight in, and they took the city. (Josh 6:20-NIV)

3. On two separate occasions Jesus himself entered the temple, which had been turned into a marketplace, and did some shaking of tables. Sending doves flying, and coins falling. That day, heaven shook the earth as the one from heaven did some shaking on earth.

12 Then Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all those who were selling and buying in the temple courts, and turned over the tables of the money changers and the chairs of those selling doves. (Matt 21:12-NET)

4. Jesus prophesied that the temple in Jerusalem would be shaken and in 70 A.D., Rome destroyed the holiest place on the planet as Jews were slaughtered and their religious sights were desecrated.

But he responded, "Do you see all these buildings? I tell you the truth, they will be completely demolished. Not one stone will be left on top of another!" (Matt 24:2-NLT)

This shaking comes about when God has a new order, a new purpose, or a new plan to implement with his people. In his church. Including this church Bethel Life Center. Did you know we are living in a time when God is doing some shaking?

God did some shaking on Sept 11, or 9.11 as it has become known as. Our world was turned upside-down by terrorism. If you remember, churches filled up the next Sunday as people sought answers to the question, "What is the shaking going on?" People wanted answers to what was disrupting and shaking their lives.

American and the world experienced a global contagion that has become identified as Covid. The entire planet experienced a planetary lockdown. Businesses shutdown. Streets empty. Schools on-line. A disturbance. A shaking. A shaking of markets. A shaking of governments. A shaking of churches.

A virus that turned the world upside down and threatened to not only take lives. It also took away our freedoms. It took away even our families.

What is God speaking, "listen carefully because I am getting ready to return to earth and start the countdown to the end of the age." Now, so many like me in college, become really anxious when you start talking about end time events.

Jesus suggests that you do not have to be anxious about The End.

In John 14, Jesus reminds his disciples that his end and their beginning is about to happen. Jesus had told his disciples he would die soon, in the previous chapter (13:3). This caused the disciples to become anxious.

Jesus tells the disciples that when I leave, you cannot come with me. Upon hearing this the disciples melted down into panic. Thomas had a panic attack. Phillip became OCD. Peter became fearful. James and John, the Sons of Thunder, became angry.

The disciples had trusted Jesus to put them in a boat of salvation, now they needed to trust him as the boat traveled through some storms and shakings. Every storm or shaking will cause us to throw up or throw in the towel or fill our sails with fresh faith for the journey.

Jesus immediately, seeing their anxiety offers them a promise to anchor to. ²*My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?* ³*And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me so that you also may be where I am. (John 14-NIV)*

Let's pause for a moment and move from the promise of Jesus' return to some facts about His return. These facts about The End will perhaps, lower your RPMs of anxiety regarding Jesus' return.

The return of Christ comes as a packaged deal: rapture and second coming!

Christ's life>> Church Age>> Rapture>> Tribulation>> 2nd Coming!

Whether a seasoned Christ follower or new to the faith, let go of your anxiety about what will happen at the end.

The return of Christ is not a formula to be figured out or a code to be broken, it is a day to be anticipated.

God is doing some shakings. It is all a part of a Sovereign plan that has been in the making since the beginning of time. Looking closely at John 14, we can anchor to 3 solid truths about Jesus' return. The rapture.

Give to Christ your anxieties. (John 14:1)

Give God your anxiety about the end. About the economy. About the elections. About your earache and epilepsy. God uses shakings in the refining process.

Christ is preparing a home, with an abundance of rooms. (John 14:2)

The city is laid out like a square, it is as long as it is wide. John measured the city with the rod, Rev. 21:16-17. What do you feel when you are limited to a wheelchair in recovery? Dorm rooms in college are so suffocating. Does your workspace cubicle cause you claustrophobia? Tight quarters, we've all been in them. A small hotel room. Small bunks on an aircraft carrier. A home with a growing family.

If these and other settings are the norm, then Heaven will be enjoyed like you can't imagine. Heaven is a real place with "space to burn." When you get to heaven and look up in the Thesaurus words for *spacious* you will find:

...freedom

...property lines that you lose track of when you attempt to count the distance of your boundary,

...territorial views,

...out of breath trying to walk your property,

The apostle John was given a guided tour one day of this home, that we are going to call the Father's House. It is so spacious it has no earthly comparison. In the book *The Revelation Record*, author Henry Morris gives us a glimpse of the calculations:

The cube described in Rev. is 1500 miles square. This would be the equivalent of the area from Canada to Mexico and from the Atlantic Ocean to the Rockies. This residence could easily accommodate over 20 billion people. Each

person would have his own private room, mansion or Trump Tower that was a 75-acre cube. This would leave plenty of room for parks, streets, buildings. Heaven is going to be big.

In my Father's House are many rooms-for all who choose to call it home! So, feel free to invite everyone you want:

...bring the whole family-even weird uncle Harold.
...don't leave out any of your friends,
...go all the way back to your early school days and bring.

Bring your friends from Elementary school, from your little league team, from the Boy Scouts; in fact, why don't you invite your whole High School graduating class?

Oh, ok - bring everyone from the city you grew up in. In fact, why not think big, bring them all...your state, your country - everybody in the entire world!

Heaven is going to be a great big place. Heaven will have maps and guided tours, so you don't miss a thing. You will have unlimited time to enjoy everything (no picking and choosing on this vacation because of time constraints or lack of money) and to enjoy everyone.

As the days draw closer to the dawning of a new age, somewhere in the universe God is at work this very moment building a spacious home with you in mind. A healing home. A herculean home. A holy home. A heavenly home. A hospitable home.

Jesus is preparing a place for you and preparing you for his place. (John 14:3)

You're driving down the street when you notice a sign in a shop window. It reads, "Closed for Alterations." The business owner has suspended doing business with the public, long enough to renovate the store. After a while, the store will be reopened with many new changes and improvements.

Christian, welcome to your future: closed for alterations. One day you will move out of your body. Your absence will offer God an opportunity for many

wonderful alterations. At the resurrection, your soul and spirit will return home to a glorious body.

The believer's passage to heaven is a direct route. The moment we take our last breath on earth we take our first breath in heaven.

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As Joni Eareckson says, "somewhere within you is the pattern of the heavenly person you will become, and if you want to catch a glimpse of how glorious and full of splendor your body will be, just do a comparison. Compare a hairy peach with the tree it comes from, loaded with fragrant blossoms and sweet fruit. They are totally different and yet, the same.

Somewhere in my broken, paralyzed body is a seed of what I shall become. The paralysis makes what I am to become even more grand, when you contrast atrophied, useless legs against splendorous resurrected legs. There's no way I can comprehend it all because I am just an 'acorn' when it comes to understanding."
(8)

One of the briefest encounters with a person in the bible is found in Luke 2. It is connected to the arrival of Jesus Christ, the first time. It offers an example of how to wait for Jesus' arrival the second time.

How Simeon waited for Jesus first arrival, provides an example of how YOU should wait for Jesus' next arrival. (Luke 2:25-TJB)

Our ever so brief encounter with Simeon happens 8 days after the birth of Jesus Christ. Mary is nursing, Simeon is praying. Joseph is working, Simeon is watching. According to the custom, a child was to be dedicated on the 8th day to God.

Now, in Jerusalem there was a man named Simeon. He was an upright and devout man; he looked forward to Israel's comforting and the Holy Spirit rested on him" (Luke 2:25-TJB)

There is a lot going on at the temple those days. Families offer sacrifices. Children screaming from circumcision. Loud and enthusiastic celebrations are happening as families pray and dedicate their newborn to the giver of Life- Jehovah Jirah, my provider.

Grey haired and grizzly. Simeon walks intently toward the temple. That morning in prayer time, his own version of 15 minutes in a chair, Simeon feels prompted by the Holy Spirit to rearrange his schedule and make an unplanned stop at the temple.

Simeon was a man who was standing tall, looking earnestly, and expecting a promise to be fulfilled.

In the later years of his life Simeon, has one reoccurring thought; when the Messiah comes, I want to see him before I die. You see in one of those times of prayer and worship; *the Holy Spirit had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen him-God's anointed King. (Luke 2:26-TLB)*

Simeon prayed daily that God would fulfill his promise to see Jesus. And God does just that. How would Simeon know which child was the king? And so, he searches? What will Simeon do when he sees the parents? And so, he searches. Will Simeon's life have as much meaning after this prophetic encounter? And so, he searches.

Listen to a variety of translations of a man on a search. A man on a mission. A man possessed.

*²⁵ A man named Simeon was in Jerusalem. He was righteous and devout. He **eagerly anticipated** the restoration of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. (Luke 2:25-CEB)*

*²⁵ There was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, **looking forward** to Israel's consolation,^[a] and the Holy Spirit was on him. (Luke 2-HCSB)*

²⁵ There was in Yerushalayim a man named Shim'on. This man was a tzaddik, he was devout, he waited eagerly for God to comfort Isra'el, and the Ruach HaKodesh was upon him. (Luke 2:25-CJB)

That day, Simeon eagerly anticipated (like a nervous groom, awaiting his bride), as he leaned forward and looked forward.

The word used to describe Simeon standing on his tiptoes is pros-dechomai. Dechomai means to wait. And "pros" is the prepositional word, forward.

Simeon was waiting forwardly. Earnestly vigilant and diligent. Eyes scanning the crowd. Heart open to a new shaking. Suddenly, with the prompting of the Holy Spirit, Mary and Joseph emerge from the crowd at the temple.

One look into the face of Jesus, and Simeon knew Jesus had arrived. Simeon waited. Simeon watched. Simeon did not worry. A promise had been fulfilled. It was time to go home. So, look forward. Look up. Look longing for a Savior that could appear at any moment.

Simeon was waiting, not worrying. Let's do the same!

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