

Chronicles of Diversity

Your leadership weekly



**Unbroken sod, that one day will
again reflect God's ownership**

Fractured Rapture Tales

Tale 22: It is finished

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If one were to set out to design a religious institution which would be ineffective in its mission, you would have to look no farther than the American Evangelical Church, unless it might be the American Roman Catholic Church. This religious mediocrity is a natural development as people take the road of religious ease instead of following the difficult narrow path of obedient faith.

To begin this church creation, you would give it a strong heritage in revivalism. This basically means the church takes credit and spends most of its resources doing God's work, saving sinners. Then with limited financial resources left for doing the churches real work, making disciples, the church becomes a temporary religious ghetto, or cloister, or social club a few hours a week. Then infuse this concoction with a liberal dose of traditional rapture teaching, mix in a mountain of self-righteous legalism, and sprinkle this mixture with the sweet illusion of materialism and you have created one of the great wonders of this modern world.

To be fair to the church however, as bad as it is, the decadence outside her grace saved living stones, makes one hope for the not too distant day when eternity will become reality.

Change is brought about by God as men and women are anointed by the Holy Spirit into unction beyond the church's hallowed halls, into dependence upon God alone, not only for salvation, but their very essence. That of course is defined as faith, something we try with all our personal wit and strength to avoid.

As we have tried to portray in this series, this unction leads to a position where "The Rapture" becomes a promise being lived in the rapture of the present. Eternal life can begin to be lived on this side of death and this side of "The Rapture" if you only allow God to be God, Jesus Christ to be Messiah, and to rest in that completed work finished on Calvary.

When we live in, and to the extent we allow God to bring the Resurrection into our lives, to that

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extent we can begin to get a glimpse of life beyond the veil of death, or the eternal aspects of The Rapture.

Now if “it was finished on Calvary” what is represented by what is normally considered The Rapture?

Revelation Chapter 4 begins with the concept of entering heaven. Church theologians until the 19th century considered this only in the symbolic sense and only relating to the vision of John’s actual Revelation. In the nineteenth and until this present day the vast majority of evangelicalism has broadened this vision to include the end of the church age in Revelation Chapter 3 and the transportation of the church to heaven to sit out the impending Great Tribulation of seven years from that location (Revelation 4-19).

The fractured questions we have to look at before we continue are:

1. Does this traditional rapture interpretation limit our understanding of this possible event, by interpreting scripture in a way that we can understand?
2. Is this Rapture exegesis any better than the one(s) that preceded it in church history?
3. What does the Bible actually say in the contextual passage, in Biblical context, and in the cultural context of when it is written?

After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, “Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.” Revelation 4:1

The Bible clearly teaches that this life will be full of trials and tribulations. In the religious sense, teaching that we will not be here to undergo these “Great Tribulations” not only is escapist, it gives us essentially nothing for today beyond this passage except, “I have read the book and in the end we win.”

In evangelical tradition there is really no application here to trials and tribulations we may be currently undergoing, we won’t be here, we are so holy, you need to get saved and join our heavenly feast. This is nothing but religion at its best or worse, depending upon your definition. It doesn’t much fit with the concept of “There but by the grace of God, go I.”

This contrasts with the amillennial view, previous to the 19th century, that this whole Revelation period was symbolic and could only be applied to present events without any future prophetic fulfillment. Both revelations in there distinct forms are wrong. Yes, aspects of this part can be applied to us today, and yes there will be a time of Great Tribulation.

“God, The Rapture has to take place the way I understand it and I have been taught, because I don’t want to go through the Great Tribulation where You pour out Your judging wrath on this sinful world.”

This truth of grace should be self evident. A full understanding of the gospel, and the concepts of propitiation, justification, God’s love, and grace should dispel that judgment worry. It is finished, learn it, teach it, and live in it. On the cross Jesus Christ became our sin and took our judgment upon himself. “What part of, It is finished, don’t you understand?” The reason that it hasn’t been finished in many cases, is in Christian religion the gospel really isn’t what it is all about, its too bloody and exclusive. It turns off the seekers.

Historic Premillennialism was the eschatology of the early church. Dispensational Premillennialism is the eschatology of modern religious evangelicalism. Both believe that in Revelation 20 the six times “a thousand years” is mentioned refers to an actual period of time and should not be symbolized. Dispensationalism adds the exegesis of The Rapture which was not a generally accepted biblical interpretation until the 19th century.

So let us see if we can develop another scenario for the rapture that is somewhat different from that well recognized evangelical program, gives us food for thought and study, and encompasses the truth of Isaiah 55: 8,9 “*For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,*” says the LORD. “*For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.*”

John sees a door opened in heaven. This is a passage way much more than a door from one place

to another, it is the transition from the universe as we now know it, to a condition where not only the “land belongs to God” but everything belongs to God and perfectly reflects His attributes and His Glory. This open door, so to speak, is a passage way to not only heaven, but to all eternity and its absolute perfection.

Revelation 21-22 speaks and prophesies to the time when that door way from eternity to this temporal existence will disappear. So what we are really discussing in the intervening Chapters is not only the period known as the Great Tribulation of God’s judgment on a Christ rejecting world, but also a time of transition between the current world state and the eternal state. Put another way, this is the time when “it is finished will be completed.”

Provided you are not part of the receiving of judgment part, which the church by God’s grace is not, what would happen if in that grace, God allowed His people not to dispense His judgment, but to be participants in that new creative process. Not only in that Revelation 20 period of one thousand years, but during that seven year period as a witness not only to Israel, but also to those who are rejecting God’s grace determined to go their own way even if it means going to hell for eternity.

“Well where did you get that leap of faith?” It is really less of a leap of faith than the orthodox rapture teaching! “How so?”

In the Genesis flood, Noah was not raptured to heaven, and then sent back after the flood to repopulate the earth, He was instructed to by faith build an ark. In that boxy boat Noah and his family were saved from God’s destruction and judgment of the earth. God could have raptured him, but in His grace he had a more artful story to tell.

To be part of The Rapture instead, you are told to believe that the church will depart like Enoch and Elijah, and be no more. But if you read the stories of both of these raptures, you will see that these two righteous men, did not get raptured out of times of judgment, but rather normal times of life in this sinful world. These times continued basically unchanged by their departure. Furthermore, these men were righteous not only by faith but it was evident by their works. Evangelical religion and most evangelicals do not walk that path.

Now in the New Testament there is a lot of references about a catching away of believers to be with the Lord including Christ’s own discussion in Matthew 25. Perhaps the most specific is 1 Corinthians 15: 50-58:

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.”

“O Death, where is your sting?

O Hades, where is your victory?”

The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

What we see here, is not a discussion of heaven specifically, but about eternity and its perfection. It is an assumption not in anyway indicated by the text that this transition must take place either in heaven or on the way there. God is perfectly capable of performing the operation in situ.

The assumed context for the eternal transformation taking place on the way to heaven comes from 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18:

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.

This again gives the context of eternity, and does not speak of going to heaven at all, but only the

conditions of the eternal transformation. The proper cultural context of that era was when you went out of the city to meet the king, you returned to the city to hold a great feast to celebrate his arrival. There was no cultural basis to go out to meet a king and then go on with him in his journey to another place or city, there to hold a feast.

Most would assume that the transformed will not continually be “with the Lord in the air,” but there must be some non specified destination. Whether that be to heaven, or back to earth the passage does not in and of itself testify. And it really should make no difference to you, if you truly believe in the comfort portion of the passage.

“So how in God’s name could I live on this earth, when all hell is breaking loose even if I am living in my eternal state?”

Simply in your incorruptible eternal condition the laws of corruption do not apply. You will be with the Lord by definition and in reality. In a time when all the universe is following God’s rules, all of God’s rules shall be applied. Just because we don’t presently know all those rules doesn’t change these absolutes.

The truths of corruption are all we know from our youth, but some glimpse of that rapt incorruptible state is available by our disciplined choice of obedience to God’s love, grace, and friendship. Put in a more evangelical acceptable form, it is not religion, but relationship.

Our world today is made up of contrasts. Between good and evil for example. Or between God’s way and the world’s way. Or between the cities of Jerusalem and Babylon. Augustine would call these cities by a more religiously acceptable terms “The City of God” and “The City of Man,” but in eternal reality it is either Babylon or Jerusalem.

Could there be a contrast on earth of the Great Tribulation of destruction and judgment versus an ascendancy of the Millennial Kingdom of Jesus Christ, a time of restoration and peace? Both separated divinely by God but somewhat occupying adjacent territory in time, sort of like the biblical concept of Abraham’s Bosom.

In the middle of a passage of Isaiah describing the religion of Old Testament Israel, and giving a foreboding prophesy of impending judgment we find one promise of God that has a still to be fulfilled aspect. That passage in Isaiah 58: 6-12 might give such a foretaste of not only the millennial kingdom but also a God ordained contrast to the Revelation apocalypse. Ê

“Is this not the fast that I have chosen:

To loose the bonds of wickedness,

To undo the heavy burdens,

To let the oppressed go free,

And that you break every yoke?

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,

And that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out;

When you see the naked, that you cover him,

And not hide yourself from your own flesh?

Then your light shall break forth like the morning,

Your healing shall spring forth speedily,

And your righteousness shall go before you;

The glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.

Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer;

You shall cry, and He will say, “Here I am.”

“If you take away the yoke from your midst,

The pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness,

If you extend your soul to the hungry

*And satisfy the afflicted soul,
Then your light shall dawn in the darkness,
And your darkness shall be as the noonday.
The LORD will guide you continually,
And satisfy your soul in drought,
And strengthen your bones;
You shall be like a watered garden,
And like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.
Those from among you
Shall build the old waste places;
You shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
And you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach,
The Restorer of Streets to Dwell In.*

That would be a great witness of Rapture in the time of the Great Tribulation. A witness of choice and opportunity that still most of humanity will reject.

This rapture possibility is not shared with any claim of divine inspiration, rather if I were to classify it, I would call it a work of rapt fiction in the beginning of the “Stay Behind” series. Lest I take credit for even the idea myself, it was developed from a paper on the eschatology of Charles Spurgeon at <http://www.spurgeon.org/eschat.htm>

The point of this series has not been to get you to change your eschatology. Mr. Gibbons my old college philosophy teacher used to say, “If your philosophy changes anyones mind, it probably doesn’t come from the wisdom and strength of your arguments, but the weakness of theirs.”

In that light, the point of this now finished fractured rapture series is not to let any of your religious beliefs (the rapture being our prime focus) get in the way of your relationship with God, not now, not ever. The grace of God is sufficient no matter what the future holds, therefore we are not to fear the future. Even if we have been taught from our youth that the future is a scary time.

Only the foolish claim to know the specifics of what God is doing in our world at this time, the truth is however that He is preparing a wedding feast for His Son that will one day take place. I haven’t got my invitation yet, so I have to say the time and place are to be determined. My prediction is that just getting to go to heaven a few years early, will one day in the not to distant future seem rather childish.

However, the main thing I am grateful for, is that I am a child of the living and eternal God. That, and the gifts and blessing God has poured into my life should rapture me, especially when my corruption and the corruption of this world seem so powerful. That is the power of contrast, and our hope for eternity.

At that marriage feast all of God’s children will be raptured to say as a toast to our groom, “It is truly finished!”

Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.