

Chronicles of Diversity

Your leadership weekly



St. Paul's Mission, NE Washington

Tribulation Trail

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PDF document attached.

To follow up briefly on Rebuke Road last week, when Jesus rebuked the storm in Matthew Chapter 8, note that the storm was rebuked and the waves calmed themselves. Jesus didn't rebuke the waves to calm the storm. This is important in all community situations, and at most other times, including these super natural occurrences in the Bible. The exhortation for change should be done to the community. In the same way praise should be given to the individual.

This principle is shown in coaching where the team loses, and the team wins, but after a victory, individual outstanding performances should be noted, motivating individuals to greater exploits as members of the team during the next game. Individual criticism most of the time does little good, for most people of integrity know when they blow it. Reminding them of these failures, may draw more attention to these past occurrences, and take focus from the work of achieving a better performance next time. These principles should be practiced in church leadership, family, business as well as other enterprises of life.

This concept is important because on the Tribulation Trail, we want to look at probably the greatest dividing principle in the modern evangelical church community. It also becomes a significant point of tribulation to the individual. Our focus relates to church eschatology, what will happen at the end of time. Pre-trib, mid-trib, post-trib, while many state this is an in house debate within the family of the church, many times criticisms are not general rebukes, but vicious attacks on the conscientious individual, trying to make sense out of conflicting teachings.

With that in mind, this week we will set the record straight, and at least everyone who reads this will finally have a definite understanding of my take on the subject.

Charles Spurgeon, was said to have remarked of John Darby, one of the founders of modern Dispensationalism, "That if he (Darby) could write in plain English, people would quickly learn he didn't have much to say."

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Now just for fun, instead of the negative connotation that we would so readily like to read into this statement, no matter which side of this statement your beliefs lie, let's do a little twenty first century spin doctoring. For this point of view, the esteemed preacher Spurgeon was just complementing Mr. Darby on his understanding of the obvious.

In the "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" which we have used these last couple of weeks. The Mariner intercepts three guests on their way to a wedding feast. But only one decides to stay and listen to the Mariner's tale. Because of his desire to learn this seafaring rime, he never makes it to the wedding.

Now this might not be all that important in a secular understanding of this poem, but in England in the mid 19th century, there was concern for what would become of those not called to the marriage feast of the Lamb in Revelation 19:9. Or as we say today, who might be left behind. The religious education of Coleridge would give us the impression that he was at least familiar with the concept, and that his conclusion was that it would be better for mankind to listen to the words of the Ancient Mariner, wandering over the landscape, preaching reverence for all of God's creatures, hence he was not to be invited to the wedding or to this heavenly feast.

At this time, the established church believed in the historic eschatology, of most of its history which is called Amillennialism, or the realized millennia. This belief states that when Jesus Christ ascended to the right hand of the father, He began His millennial rule of the universe from heaven. At the second coming, that heavenly rule would, be visibly extended over the fallen nature of earth, thereby removing the curse of sin and death that still plagues our world.

The heavenly rule of Jesus Christ is a significant part of orthodox Christian doctrine, but is it the millennium? The problem is that when extending that millennium into the realm of realized reign at this time, you must in some way symbolize the six references to one thousand years in Revelation 20:2-7. Now both Spurgeon and Darby were men who valued directly what the word of God said above what the religious establishment might esteem correct.

The Bible is about a third prophetic in nature. Some of this relates to the coming of Messiah the first time. Some relates to things that have been fulfilled in ancient Israel. But much of it remains, at least on a Biblical time line, to be fulfilled at the end of time. This period before the second coming of Jesus Christ, is referred to as the Day of the Lord, and a short time of Great Tribulation.

How you define Israel in these passages, and whether you literally or spiritually interpret these references, and how you have been taught, and whether you accept or reject those teachings, forms the framework on how you will interpret these prophetic passages.

As you get away from what the Bible says directly, and get into where you must interpret the Bible by what others say about it, lie the deserts of escatological divisions and strife. To put it into the wisdom of Solomon:

The Conclusion of the Matter

Not only was the Teacher wise, but also he imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs. The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true.

The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails-given by one Shepherd. Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them.

Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body.

Now all has been heard;

here is the conclusion of the matter:

Fear God and keep his commandments,

for this is the whole duty of man.

For God will bring every deed into judgment,

including every hidden thing,

whether it is good or evil.

For some reason, this true wisdom escapes many as they venture into understanding of these end time events. These proverbs are especially true with the many books that support your particular understanding of scripture, at the expense of a common reading of the Bible.

Darby's particular claim to fame, was support of a variation of the premillennial return of Jesus Christ, which had fallen out of vogue in church circles for over a thousand years. He and his followers in the Plymouth Brethren, in that premillennial scenario believed that the church would not have to go through the Great Tribulation of the Book of Revelation, and spoken of in Matthew 24 and elsewhere.

According to the website that chronicles Spurgeon's work, (spurgeon.org) Spurgeon shared Darby's Premillennialism, but not necessarily his ideas of biblical dispensations to support the concept of the church being exempt from the Great Tribulation.

Just as a side light, the concept of the church not having to go through the Great Tribulation was a promotion of a vision received by Margaret MacDonald, in 1836, the same year as the publishing of the last edition of the "*Rime of the Ancient Mariner*."

Darby's, and the following work of Scofield, and the Dallas Seminary and a whole host of other theologians and lay persons, have promoted a number of special epochs of time, or dispensations, when God deals uniquely with the world (and man) in specific ways. By the nature of this work, it also forces a literal interpretation of Biblical passages that for many years had been spiritualized by the church.

Now Amillennialism teaches that Jesus Christ rules and reigns the universe from heaven at this time. But that was also true in the time of Job. Anything that happens to one of God's children only occurs because for some reason God allows it. This has been true throughout all time.

With this in mind, have you ever asked the question, why did, or does God allow His church this broad divergence in thought concerning the end of time?

God always deals with mankind in love, mercy, and grace. When you overlay those three, of the many attributes of God, on created time, specific dispensational time periods lose a lot of their significance. That is except when an interpretation of scripture, should be literally interpreted. This is something at the time of Darby and Spurgeon that had not been done for a millennia.

Dispensations are not required however, to get to a rapture of the church before the Great Tribulation. The Great Tribulation is truly and wisely a time of judgement on worldly systems. The church through the gospels has legally and forever been judged righteous, by the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ alone, and hence not directly part of this judgement.

In that regard, only the utilization of Augustine's "City of God - City of Man" concept is required to bring about this separation between man's evils system and God's perfect rule. Assuming that the Great Tribulation, shall be an actual time event preceding the second coming of Christ and the actual establishment of a thousand year millennial kingdom on this earth, then an actual separation of the two cities is required, not because of some great revelation of biblical organization, but by simple logic.

The rapture of the church to heaven, and the left behind concept so popular today (and perhaps in the time of the Ancient Mariner) is one scenario for this to occur. It is completely plausible in the mind of men. In fact it is, from our perspective, the most amazing gift that God could bestow upon his children of that Tribulation time. Or is it?

The dictionary on my computer lists the following definitions for rapture:

SYLLABICATION:

rap-ture

NOUN:

1. The state of being transported by a lofty emotion; ecstasy. 2. An expression of ecstatic feeling. Often used in the plural. 3. The transporting of a person from one place to another, especially to heaven.

TRANSITIVE VERB:

Inflected forms: rap-tured , rap-tur-ing , rap-tures

To enrapture.

ETYMOLOGY:

Obsolete French, abduction, carrying off, from rapt, carried away, from Old French rat, from Latin raptus. See rapt.

If the dictionary lists the rapture of the church as the third meaning for rapture, what incredible rapture might God create if He decided to use definition 1, or 2, or better yet redefine the term from a completely Godly way (especially since He saw fit to leave at least the third meaning out of the canon of scripture), making all this grace apparent to His followers during that time of judgement on the world and its system. Just because it is a mystery to our mind, makes it all the more possible for God.

1 Corinthians 2:9

But as it is written:

“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,
Nor have entered into the heart of man

The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.” [quoting Isaiah 64:4]

Isaiah 55:7-9

*Let the wicked forsake his way,
And the unrighteous man his thoughts;*

Let ~~him~~ to the LORD,

And He will have mercy on him;

And to our God,

For He will abundantly ~~par~~

“For My thoughts ~~not~~ your thoughts,

~~Not~~ your ways My ways,” says the LORD.

“For as the heavens ~~higher~~ than the earth,

~~My~~ ways higher than your ways,

And My thoughts than your thoughts.

Now we have as historical evidence, just how heavenly minded and persuasive, a group of dedicated followers of Jesus Christ can be with a dubious theology and a third rate definition. How shall we hold them back?

I doubt I am the only person who has seen a link between the rise of Dispensational Premillennialism and Postmillennialism. Both were created in the 19th century after a thousand years of amillennial and spiritualized thought. One says “look up we could leave at any time”. The other says, “Occupy and conquer the land in the name of Jesus Christ.”

While the Bible talks of the path of discipleship to be a straight and narrow path, if that path is are remake of the broad way that leads to destruction (Matthew 7:13-14) then that dusty path less traveled, must have big ditches on either side.

Now, I know my readers have never ventured into those ditches and the wilderness that quickly encroaches on the path, but I am grateful for the grace that many times gets me back to the straight and narrow. At that time I get a rapturous look of what the future holds, and that enables me to understand that difficulty of the path, or the delusion of the ditches that are part of God’s unique gift to each individual as we journey to the ultimate Wonder Springs.

Perhaps, this is the glimpse that the gifted Spurgeon had when he stated that Darby had little to say (in context to that eternal rapture). For outside the grace that allows us the eternal Jerusalem as our home, we all have very little to say that will make any eternal sense. We walk a tribulation trail, following the ways of other’s and not the Bible, and we walk a Tribulation Trail, because the Bible makes it a prescription for discipleship. The gift of godly wisdom, is to decide which trail is which, and quickly get back to the trail that God has for us. Life in Jesus Christ is truly a enrapturing life, and it will get infinitely better than this, as God brings this age to an end. But that rapture will not be for all people, some will be left behind.