

Pastor's LETTERS

Easter - Joy and Glory Forever

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

During the Easter season, Christians focus on two major themes – death and resurrection. One of the widely held beliefs when considering resurrections is a belief known as “the rapture.” The “rapture” is a teaching among some Christians about what happens to the church before Jesus’ coming in glory, commonly referred to as “the Second Coming.” The phrase “the rapture of the church” refers to the belief that Christians will be “caught up” to be with Christ sometime around his glorious return. The rapture event is said to protect the church from a period of great tribulation. Those who believe in a rapture rely mainly on this passage of Scripture, [1 Thessalonians 4:15-17](#):

According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 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. 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.

The rapture doctrine seems to have originated with a man named John Nelson Darby around 1830. He divided the time of the second coming into two stages. Darby said Christ would come *for* his saints (the “rapture”) before the tribulation and he would come *with* his saints after it, which he thought was Jesus’ true coming in glory or second coming. Proponents of the rapture disagree as to when it will occur in relationship to the “great tribulation” before Christ returns. They are divided over whether the rapture will happen before, during or after the tribulation.

What is our view on the rapture? If we look at [1 Thessalonians 4:15-17](#), the apostle Paul seems to simply say that at “the trumpet call of God” the dead in Christ will rise first and those believers who were alive would be caught up together with them “in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.” There is no discussion of the church, or a part of the church, being raptured or taken away before, during or after a tribulation period. [Matthew 24:29-31](#) seems to be describing a similar event. In Matthew, Jesus says that the saints are caught up “after the distress of those days,” which includes the tribulation. They are caught up at Jesus’ second coming. From such Scriptures, it’s hard to see the distinctions that exponents of the rapture attempt to make. For this reason, the church historically has chosen the straightforward reading of the Scriptures mentioned above, which do not describe a special rapture. The verses in question simply say that the dead saints will be resurrected and will be joined by those who are yet alive when Jesus returns in glory.

The question of what specifically will happen to the church before, during and after Jesus returns in glory is not clearly addressed in Scripture. What we can be sure about is what Scripture is clear and dogmatic about: Jesus will return in glory to judge the world. Those who are found in allegiance to him will be resurrected and live with him in joy and glory forever.

Larry