

Prophecy Lesson 15
Preparing for the Coming Rapture

Prophecy 14's lesson notes concluded with a 'Sinners' prayer which, if truly and honestly prayed, might begin the process of turning an unbeliever into a fully committed, 'born again' believer in Jesus Christ. Sadly, such prayers rarely work unless being prayed by a soul who is truly at the end of themselves, in search of real hope and peace of mind from life's problems and burdens after nothing else has worked. Actually, the 'Sinners' prayer is not the first step in the transformation process of becoming a believer because there is a very important step that comes before one can honestly confess their sin in prayer. The first and most difficult step in the transformation process for the unsaved person is to recognize they are an unrepentant sinner. They must humbly admit to themselves that they are not just an unrepentant sinner, but that there is absolutely nothing they can do on their own to fix their sin problem. They must recognize that they need a redeemer and believe with all their heart that forgiveness of sin, salvation and eternal life are only available through the shed blood and saving grace found in Jesus Christ alone. I suspect that few people are so burdened by life's problems or convicted by their sinful nature they feel a sense of urgency to pray that prayer. "After all, life is pretty good right now and things seem to be returning to 'normal' again after the U.S. election debacle" you might be thinking. Besides, "I'm a good person. It's tough to feel like I'm the kind of sinner described in these lessons when things seem to be going pretty well, maybe even be improving." Sadly, such a focus is on the wrong things. Since these lessons are available to a broad audience and there may be some who read them with the above mindset, I want to dedicate this lesson, **Preparing for the Rapture**, to those who might be skeptical or have doubts about what's coming, because if something doesn't change, this mindset will lead to certain destruction. In truth, things are not getting better in the world and, according to Scripture, they will not improve until after Christ returns. All the pieces for God's end time puzzle truly are falling rapidly into place.

What makes this series of prophecy lessons, based on God's First and Second Advent heavenly signs, so unique is that heavenly signs mark specific dates and thus give context and perspective to end time events that most other prophesied end time signs cannot independently do. The timing of end time events for most prophesied signs is normally derived from the combination of an increase in the frequency and intensity of specific sign(s) and convergence – or the coming together of all the signs to indicate a general timeframe or season for the Lord's return. Jesus predicted the time of His return would be characterized by the appearance of false Christ's, wars and rumors of wars, nation rising against nation, increasing and more frequent natural disasters (famines, earthquakes, pestilence, etc), increasing persecution of the church, a great falling away from the faith (apostasy in the church), the appearance of many false prophets, an increase in violence and immorality, and because of the increase in wickedness, the love of most will grow cold (Matthew 24: 4-12). All of this is happening now. The signs have all appeared and they continue to increase in frequency and intensity and will continue to do so into the Tribulation. Part of our problem in recognizing the change is that it has been gradual. It began in earnest in the 1960's and it slowly increased in frequency and intensity over the past sixty years to a point where what we see happening today appears to be normal - or the "new" normal for at

least three generations of people. So much so that it is hard for believers to recognize the significance of the change. Based on all that has transpired towards the fulfillment of end time Bible prophecy, the most comprehensive conclusion I've heard from prophecy experts is that Jesus is coming again, soon, and/or that we are in the 'season' of the Lord's return. Both statements are true of course. But, Jesus' soon return has been trumpeted by those who believe He is coming for most of these past 60 years and we've been in the 'season' of the Lord's return for the past 20 years. So, when is He coming? Is there a timeframe? Can we be more specific?

I believe the Advent chronologies paper in Lesson 12 in this series of lessons is most important because it adds clarity to God's end time chronology that no single prophetic sign can. The appearance of the Christmas Star on June 17, 2 BC marked the birth of Jesus. This date and Scripture confirm that Christ's crucifixion Passover was in 33 AD. The resurrected Savior ascended into heaven on May 15, 33 AD. The prophet Hosea revealed that the Lord will depart (the earth) and return to his place (heaven) for 2 days (2,000 years). After 2 days (2,000 years) He will return, raise up the Jewish remnant that survives the Tribulation and He will establish His kingdom here on earth where He will reign in Peace, Righteousness and Justice for one thousand years. For us today, the most important date in this chronology is the date derived from Christ's ascension to heaven that reveals a 'not before' date for the Second Coming – May 15, 2033. While the Bible tells us that Jesus will not return before that date, it also reveals that *"The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient, not wanting anyone to perish, but for everyone to come to repentance"* (2 Peter 3:9). This points to the most likely year for the Lord to return at the Second Coming being 2033. We know that Christ's return marks the end of the seven year period known as the Tribulation. Thus, we can be confident that the Tribulation will not begin before the year 2026 and the Rapture must happen before the Tribulation begins.

This brings us to the purpose of this lesson, Preparing for the Rapture. The Bible is clear that the Rapture is a sign-less event (no prophecy needs to be fulfilled for the Rapture to happen). It is an imminent event (it will happen suddenly, without warning). We are told by the Lord Himself that we cannot know the day or hour of the Rapture. And importantly, the Rapture takes place before the Tribulation begins. I haven't addressed the details of a Pre-Tribulation Rapture in these lessons, so for those who might have questions about the timing of the Rapture with respect to the Tribulation, I recommend reading the Jonathan Brentner article on the link below:

<https://www.jonathanbrentner.com/https/jonathan-brentner-g8fgsqspacecom/config/2021/2/2/questions-that-confirm-the-pretribulation-rapture-part-1> .

If we believe the Rapture will happen before the Tribulation begins, and the soonest the Tribulation can begin is 2026, then the most probable window of time for the Rapture is sometime in the next five years and most certainly by the end of the decade. Even so, there are no signs, it will happen suddenly and without warning. The best comparison I can make is this: Suppose one has a premonition that he or she might suddenly or accidentally die in the next five years. If they really believe it might happen, what would they do or change to prepare for an untimely passing, anything? Few people, dare I say, none, are prepared for a sudden death. When you accidentally die, it happens suddenly and without warning.

The differences between a sudden death and the Rapture are these: Both events happen suddenly and without warning. A sudden death may happen, but the Rapture will happen. It's not a matter of if, but when. Jesus makes this promise to all who believe in him, *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. 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 14:1-3). There is another big difference between a sudden death and the Rapture depending on whether one is saved or unsaved: For a sudden death, the moment after taking your last breath on this earth, you will instantly be either in the company of the rich man (Luke 16:19-31) in Hades (Hell) if you are unsaved, where you will remain for at least a thousand years until the Great White throne judgment (Revelation 20). If you are saved and die suddenly, you will instantly be in the presence of Jesus Christ, your Lord and Savior, in a place too glorious and remarkable to describe. At the Rapture only the saved will instantly (in the twinkling of an eye – 1 Corinthians 15:52) be translated into their resurrection bodies to be in the presence of the Lord for eternity. The unsaved will be left behind to endure the Tribulation. This should be a sobering reminder to everyone that a commitment to Christ must be made before a sudden death or the Rapture. Otherwise, it will be too late.

The solution to having peace of mind in the event of either a sudden death or the unexpected but certain Rapture is to invite Jesus Christ into your life as Lord and Savior and become saved. Jesus loves you and He sacrificed Himself on the Cross, shedding His blood for our sins so that all who believe in Him may live. *"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:6-8). This is God's gift to all who believe and it's free. There is nothing we can ever do to earn it, but by our own free will, we have to take the initiative to accept it and act on it, before it's too late.

In Part 2 of the Woefully Unprepared paper, I listed the seven things Paul describes in his letter to the Thessalonians that believers must do to prepare for the Coming of the Lord at the Rapture. So, with the background presented above, let's consider the Lord's requirements to qualify for the Rapture in a little more detail. Keep in mind the parables of the Sower (Matthew 13) and the Ten Bridesmaids (Matthew 25) while considering the requirements. I've underlined the action words in the list because preparing for the Rapture (and eternity) is not something one does passively.

How can we prepare for the Rapture?

Paul began his message on the Rapture with a statement of hope, *"Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep (die), or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again (the Gospel) and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep (died) in Him"* (1 Thessalonians 4: 12-14). Our greatest hope lies in putting our faith and trust in Jesus Christ alone. Paul then tells those who are in Christ not to worry about when the Rapture will happen, *"Now brothers, about the times and dates we do not need to write to you for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying 'Peace*

and safety, sudden destruction will come, like labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief” (1 Thessalonians 5:1-4). This is confirmation for those who’ve committed their lives to Jesus Christ that there is no need to be concerned about what happens if you suddenly die or when the Rapture happens. What follows is the list of seven things Paul specifically reveals in 1 Thessalonians 4 and 5 that believers in Christ (children of light) must do to be prepared for the coming Rapture.

1. “...believe that Christ died and rose again...”(4:14)
2. “...be alert and self-controlled...”(5:6)
3. “...encourage one another and build each other up...”(5:11)
4. “...warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone” (5:14).
5. “Be joyful always, pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances...”(5:16-18)
6. “Do not put out the Spirit’s fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt” (5:19)
7. “Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil” (5:21-22)

It should be clear from the action verbs in the list that we shouldn’t just commit our lives to Christ, then hunker down and wait it out until the Rapture comes. Nevertheless, we need to be aware that we are in a time of increasing persecution for the Church and those who put their faith and trust in Christ will likely face some degree of persecution for their faith. Jesus said, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for my names sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:10). What follows is additional insight about the list above.

1. Believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the Creator of everything, including you and me. Believing in your heart that Christ paid the price and died for your all your sins, past, present and future is the first critical step to salvation: Those who believe in Jesus will not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:16), “If you confess with your mouth and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9), “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news” (Mark 1:15), “He came as a witness to testify concerning the light, so that through Him all men might believe (John 1:7), “Yet to all those who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God...” (John 1:12). Without belief in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, there is no salvation and there is no hope.

2. Encourage one another and build each other up. This is a call to fellowship with like minded believers where you can publicly profess your faith by confessing the name of Jesus (Matthew 10:32, Romans 10:9). Such fellowship will supply you with a community of faith where you will find prayer partners and teachers who can help you develop spiritually through the study of God’s Word – the Bible. While it may be hard to find one, new believers need to find a local Christ centered, Bible based church in order to experience the kind of fellowship that grows and strengthens ones faith. Most churches now have websites that reveal their core values and provide statements about what they believe. I’ve included a link to the statement of beliefs in my church as an example of what a Christ centered, Bible based church looks like: <https://fccangels.org/ministries/what-we-believe/> . Israel is the key to

understanding God's end time plan and I'm happy to say that the last of our church's statements of belief is the expression of our full support for Israel. It's through fellowship with like minded believers that the action verb challenges to be alert, encourage, build each other up, warn, help, be patient and be joyful will manifest themselves. These action words are a reflection of the love that begins to dwell in the hearts of believers as they grow in Christ and after they begin to return the love that He showed them to others. Jesus emphasized this love in a new command before going to the Cross, "*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another*" (John 13:34-35). If you have truly given your life to Christ and are growing in Him, especially as a part of an active fellowship that focuses on Christ and the Bible, your love and faith will continue to grow and strengthen as you become one of God's 'children of light'. And as this growth happens, the need to be concerned about the timing of the Rapture or a sudden death fades away because of the peace of mind in knowing that regardless of when it happens, you'll know for certain that you will immediately be in His presence, forever.

3. *Pray continually and give thanks in every circumstance.* The fastest way to grow in Christ is to become a prayer warrior. Direct and personal communication with the God and Creator of the universe is also the fastest way to feel the presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a gift from God who dwells within you once you give your life to Christ. "*But when the Spirit of Truth (Holy Spirit) comes, He will guide you into all truth*" (Matthew 16:13). God wants us to communicate with him. It's what having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ is about. Prayer doesn't have to be fancy or eloquent. It just needs to be sincere and from the heart. Regardless of specific prayer needs, I begin my daily communication with the Lord by thanking Him for His blessings and answered prayer. Answered prayer doesn't happen if you don't communicate your needs to the Lord. A most important prayer request is the one that seeks God's will for your life. The answer may not come suddenly or dramatically, but rest assured, it will come. Pray for others. My prayer sessions end with a well known creed and prayer that combine to strengthen my faith and confirm what I believe. First, is the Apostles Creed because it is the best statement I'm aware of that expresses what we as Christians should believe. It's become a frequent reminder and a buffer against the bombardment of everything the world throws at us to try to diminish our faith and trust in Christ.

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord. Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into Hades. The third day He rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, where He sits on the right hand of God the Father, Almighty. From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Christian church, the communion of the Saints, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.

I close with the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13):

Our Father in heaven, hallowed by thy name, thy kingdom come,

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever.
Amen

For me, the underlined segments are special. Praying ‘Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven’ is a daily request for the return of our Blessed Hope at the Rapture and the Second Coming, after which Christ will set up His kingdom here on earth and begin His thousand year reign in peace, righteousness and justice. Asking for daily forgiveness from sin may seem redundant since we repent of all our sin when we give our lives to Christ. But this part of the Lord’s Prayer helps me to reflect daily on sins, especially of the heart, that may have been unknowingly committed during the previous 24 hours. Importantly, it’s also a reminder that to not forgive others is to sin. *“If you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins (Matthew 6:14-15).*

4. Do not treat prophecies with contempt Paul’s charge to not treat the prophecies with contempt is a unique requirement for the Rapture. Nearly one quarter of the Bible is prophetic. Of the more than 100 specific prophecies pointing to Christ’s first coming, some being made thousands of years in advance of their fulfillment, each one was completely and accurately fulfilled. God has a 100% track record on keeping His prophetic promises. So far, all the prophecies pointing to the Second Coming either have been or are being fulfilled as this is written. Based on what the Bible says as complemented through these lessons, we should have great confidence that Jesus will keep His promise to come again – soon! For most, these lessons contain more prophetic insight than many, including those in the church, will ever have. One of the most asked questions of Ministries proclaiming the soon return of Jesus is “Where can I find a local church that teaches Bible prophecy?” Because of the great apostasy in the church today, it may be impossible to identify local churches or pastors who teach Bible prophecy. The good news is there are a number of good online sources and TV ministries that teach, even focus on Bible prophecy. I am happy to provide a list of the resources I use, separately, for those who might be interested (Email me with your request at dodgejim990@gmail.com). The fact that the Bible specifically tells our generation to pay attention to Bible prophecy should give additional comfort and encouragement to all who put their faith and trust in God and His end time plan for His Church.

This is the final lesson in this study about God’s heavenly signs, the Second Advent Chronology and the Coming Rapture and it ends in a way I hadn’t expected. My audience at the beginning was my prophecy class and online colleagues who were interested in the Christmas Star. But over the course of the study, the email audience grew to include many who know nothing about Bible prophecy or have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It is to the latter group that I focused these closing comments, particularly the last four lessons. My sincere prayer and hope is that the lessons may help some to realize that as bad as things might appear to be in our world today, there is no greater source of hope and peace of mind than in putting one’s faith and trust in Jesus Christ. He loves you. He died for you and he’s knocking at the door of your heart. But, you have to open the door and invite him in. So in

closing I want to end with a focus on the new commandment Jesus gave that encourages us to love Him and to love one another (John 13:34-35) because it sums up the requirements for what we really need to know about the Rapture in one word – Love. It's best described in 1 Corinthians 13 as the love chapter in Scripture. I urge you to take the time to read it. It's the passage of Scripture that brought my heart to Jesus in August 1964. There are specific verses in that chapter that have special meaning for me today. *"If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing (verse 2). "Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away (verse 8). "But now we see what's reflected in a mirror dimly, but then face to face' (verse 12). "And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love" (verse 13).*

Today, I see in the mirror much better than I did 56 years ago, but I still have a long way to go to love the way Jesus loved each one of us. I cannot wait to see Him face to face. I pray that many if not most of you who shared in this prophecy lesson experience will be there so we can see Him face to face together. Blessings in Christ Jesus our Lord, Jim Dodge