

The Hope of the Church

Part 2

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[00:00:01] Because everything we believe is based on Holy Scripture, we cannot do better, whatever the shortage of time, in reading from Scripture. So, John's Gospel, chapter 14, please.

John 14, verse 1, Let not your heart be troubled, ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions, if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also. First Thessalonians, [00:01:02] chapter 4, verse 13, I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain [00:02:02] shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore, comfort one another with these words. Second Thessalonians, chapter 2, and verse 1. Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled. I am aware that some of you come from an extremely favoured and privileged background, in so far as you or your family were either born, or lived, [00:03:13] or worked, or studied in the North East of England. And because of that, you have a fair understanding of the history and geography of the North East of England. Now that's particularly useful when we think of the hope of the church. Before things were as sophisticated as they are now, when people committed crimes in the Thumbland and Durham, they were put in a cell awaiting trial, and then every now and again, every three months, a travelling [00:04:04] judge would arrive in Newcastle, and the serious cases would be brought personally before him. Travelling from somewhere down south, the judge didn't arrive all at once, and he used to pause at the very nice city of Durham. And then, in due time, he would leave Durham and would travel the 15 miles north to get to Newcastle to take over his responsibilities as the judge. Now, the judge was no mean person, and he had his own group of officials with him. But when it became the time for him to leave Durham, there was also a group of people, important people, who left the city [00:05:01] of Newcastle, possibly the Lord Mayor, certainly the High Sheriff responsible for the law system in that part of the world, together with important city officials and freemen of the city, they would leave Newcastle upon time. Now, they timed things very nicely, and the judge and his entourage travelling

north, and the Lord Mayor, the Sheriff, and the freemen of the city travelling south, they met at the highest point in between Durham and Newcastle, and a place to this day is called Sheriff Hill. Now, it's significant that God has implanted that particular incident in history.

God doesn't copy men or the world, but God has graciously implanted into the geography and history [00:06:08] of many parts of the world things that, as Paul would say, might act as types or metaphors or allegories of the truth. And I just want to take that up to use as a basis for what, in the future, in the near future, you will be studying from the scriptures that you've been allocated. The group that left Newcastle, they were not the judges, but it was their great privilege to be associated with the judge when he came officially. And because his dignity deserved it, they left the city and they went out to meet the judge at the highest point between Durham [00:07:03] and Newcastle, and then having gone out of the city to meet him, they then came back with him. Now, that's very resonant with terms from scripture, isn't it? We read in scripture that those who are going to come with the Lord Jesus will be able to come with him when he comes in power and great glory because previous to coming with him, they've gone out to meet him. And insofar as that meeting place at the top of Sheriff Hill was the highest point in the locality, they will be coming down with the judge into the city. Furthermore, when they got to Newcastle, they met in the Guildhall and had a banquet, and then the judge set about his official business. Now, we know from scripture [00:08:02] that Jesus is coming again. Praise the Lord for that. But we need to learn from scripture that his coming will be in two phases. The first phase of his coming will be that those who are his already will be drawn up, as we've read from Thessalonians, we will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air so that when he comes officially in power and great glory, we will be with him when he comes. Now, I don't want to anticipate too much, but if you pick up your sheets, please, and perhaps as it gets darker outside, the writing becomes clearer, and that's a scriptural principle in itself. But don't worry. The only thing to make sure is that in looking at the sheets, [00:09:05] we are not taking account of the numbers on the slide. Those numbers are out of date, but the printed sheets are up to date. So would you please look at sheet number 90. Slide 90. Top right-hand corner of the first sheet. Hebrews 9 says, Christ came once. Thank you. Christ came once. And the verse goes on to say that he who came once for one purpose, he will come again the second time. So this is, it is quite scriptural to say that the coming of Christ in the future is a second coming.

He came once to deal with our sins, and having done that perfectly once and for all, [00:10:05] he will never need to come again to save us from the penalty of our sins. He will come again the second time for ultimate, final, complete salvation. And that verse has been quoted. But while that's plain in scripture, as we've seen from the illustration of the judge and the high sheriff in the judicial system in the northeast of England in medieval days, so in scripture, we see that his coming doesn't all happen at once. There are two phases to that second coming. And in good Bible-based judgment, we speak of those two phases as the rapture [00:11:01] and the appearing. And we've said in the note, the rapture speaks of the coming of the Lord for his saints, his sanctified ones, as we heard yesterday. And that will be a matter of joy. His appearing, his coming with his saints, his sanctified ones, will be a matter of judgment. So the different phases of his second coming have a different character. And in this simple English language that we love so much, it lends itself to alliteration and we think of the rapture as a matter of joy and the appearing as a matter of judgment. Now, I've listed for you, and I'm not going to fall into the trap of reading them all verbatim. These notes are not for us to follow [00:12:04] through in 30 minutes. It would take much more than that. The notes are to take home so that we can all refresh our minds on what the scripture says. And just summing up, we will find that the rapture has one character and the appearing has another character. Now, in the Old Testament, there are about 300 references to the first coming of Christ when he came to put away sin by the

sacrifice of himself. I don't know, I haven't counted, there must be almost as many references in the Old Testament and the New Testament to his second coming, but almost always references to the second coming of Christ in the Bible refer to his coming in power and [00:13:03] great glory, which will be a public occasion. Every eye shall see him. Prior to that, when he comes for his own, we're going to talk a little bit about that, when he comes for his own, for you and me, believers on the Lord Jesus Christ, that will be a private occasion. John 16, the world seeth me no more. The world, the unbelieving world, don't deserve to see him in grace anymore. They refused him the first time that he came and when he comes a second time, it will not be to act in grace, it will be to act to be acting in judgment. And because of that, it has that different character. So the rapture will be private, the appearing will be public. And one more note I've made, [00:14:03] the rapture will be something that the Lord himself, 1 Thessalonians 4, the Lord himself will perform the rapture, taking his own unto himself, but at the appearing, many of the activities in the reaping, as scripture speaks of it, will be delegated to angels. Now, another overall statement. Strictly speaking, the rapture is not a subject for prophecy. It was a personal revelation from the Lord to the Apostle Paul and he met that, he fulfilled his commission when he wrote [00:15:01] 1 Thessalonians 4 and possibly 2 Thessalonians 2 verse 1. As far as I can see, only John 14, 1 Thessalonians 4 and possibly 2 Thessalonians 2 verse 1 refer to the appearing. Sorry, only those three scriptures refer to the rapture and all others refer to the appearing.

However, just to complicate things in our study, very often in speaking about other things, even the appearing, scripture uses words which describe the character of the rapture and I will hope to refer to a couple of those. I just want to deal with one matter before question time [00:16:02] because it is a common problem. We read in Matthew 24 verses 40 and 41, in both those verses, in referring to future events related to the coming again of the Lord Jesus, we read, one shall be taken and one left. Now, because of that, because those phrases ring a bell, apparently linking with the rapture, there are things before verse 40 and after 41 which we think, oh dear, I wouldn't like to think that the things in those verses are talking about Christians, well-meaning believers like you and me. Now, rest assured, [00:17:01] from chapter, in chapter 24 of Matthew, from about verses 3 or 4 until about the early 40s in the verses, the scriptures there are speaking about the Jews, the nation of Israel. And then from there till about verse 30 of chapter 25, the scriptures are speaking about the Christian church, believers, you and me. And then from verses 31 to the end of chapter 25, it's talking about Gentile nations. But people have got worried because they say, oh, if that's about the rapture, that means that some are going to be taken and some are going to be left. And of course, that's the wrong impression, as we shall hope to see very, very shortly. The answer in Matthew 24 [00:18:05] verses 40 and 41 is that after the church has gone, there will be those who in a special period are taken, but those who are taken after the rapture will be taken for judgment and those who are left will be left potentially for blessing on earth. Whereas at the rapture, those who are taken are taken for blessing and those who are left behind are left potentially for judgment. Now, I mentioned that detail, but it can be a problem. Now, a major distinction between the rapture and the appearing. The rapture, the gathering in of the Lord's own, you and me, and we'll come to see who they are in a minute, [00:19:05] is totally a matter of privilege. Now, because the word privilege begins with P, I've listed various elements of the character of the rapture with words beginning with the letter P. Why it is I don't know about the English language, you and I must get heartily weary at times of the sort of preacher that comes along and said, I'm going to present you with a bunch of sweet peas. Well, it so happens that P is a letter where you can easily think of significant words. Now, there's nothing significant in the number 11 in this case, but I have listed for you on slides 92, 93, 94, and 95, six elements of the rapture with beginning with the letter P [00:20:11] to remind us that the rapture is not something we will be present at because we deserve to be present. It will totally be in evidence of the

love of the Lord Jesus that he has for us, and we'll come to another slight expansion of that in a few moments. But if you just look at the headings, if you're going to be given homework, you may as well be known what it is. On slide 92, bottom right hand corner of the first page, the rapture will be first of all positive. I'm not going to waste your time suggesting you study something which is questionable. It is absolutely [00:21:02] sure because the Lord Jesus has said so, and I've given scriptures for that. Secondly, it will be permanent. Once he's come to take us to be with himself, we shall be with him forever and ever. So shall we ever be with the Lord. Number three, it will be a plenary session. Some of you in your modern jobs will have working parties and committees and groups, and you'll go on courses and all sorts of things, and sometimes you'll be in pairs or threes or groups, but every now and again you'll gather together and you'll all be there. That Victorian hymn writer who composed that lovely chorus, we'll all be there. Praise the Lord, we'll all be there. He was affirming [00:22:03] that the rapture will be a plenary session of the Lord's people, those who are his.

Now, with reference to that, I just want to emphasise a thing there. I've lost my, oh yes, slide 92, sorry.

Bottom of the sheet for those who are looking at it. Plenary. Now, I read from 1 Thessalonians chapter 4. This perhaps might preserve us from needing to dwell on it too long in the question session. I'm not being flippant. I say this with total reverence. [00:23:04] When the Lord Jesus comes to take us to be with himself, when he comes again, there will be two kind, two categories of believers. There will be those who have previously died, and there will be those who are still alive. Now, we read from 1 Thessalonians that it says, if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and we do, it's the basis of our salvation. Now, no complications, no honest questions, in simplicity, do you believe that Jesus died for you and rose again? If that is so, when the Lord Jesus comes privately for his own, in what scripture speaks about as the rapture, at that moment, you will either have died, [00:24:06] or you will be still alive. 1 Thessalonians 4 tells us plainly, when Jesus comes again, he will raise the dead believers, he will change the living believers, and we'll be caught up together to meet him in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord. No ifs, no buts. Dead believers raised, living believers changed. Now, that's what I mean when I say it will be a plenary session that no one will be missed out. Remember, the rapture is totally a matter of privilege extended to us because the Lord loves us, and to remind us that it's a privilege, these words begin with the letter P.

[00:25:13] Personal, I think we've covered that. Private, we've covered that. Now then, typographical error. Seven, pure grace and mercy.

The sky, not the grave, is our goal. Alter that on your copy. Pure grace and mercy. From start to finish, and I've given scriptures, the whole journey, the Lord's preserving care is not because we deserve it, but because he loves us and will see it through. Number eight, prestissimo. My musical friends tell me that the word [00:26:03] prestissimo means the shortest conceivable moment of time that could ever be imagined. You think of a shorter, one-syllable word meaning the same, instantaneous, I'd be glad to insert it. In your studies, think hard. A blinking of an eye is a very short space of time. The twinkling of an eye, the alter in expression in a fleeting moment is an even shorter space of time. For years, you know, I read 1 Corinthians 15, and I read it as that in the blinking of an eye, that's how I understood it. But scripture says no, it's not even that, in the twinkling of an eye. Premillennial, oh yes, we'll have to just say a little bit about that. [00:27:10] Linking it with 10. Pardon my French.

I was trying to think of a word that means there's nothing in the Bible which would prevent the rapture

taking place, not only in the twinkling of an eye as to how long it takes to happen, but when it will happen. We are not told when. But there's no unfulfilled scripture that needs to be fulfilled, which means there's any cause for delay in the coming of the Lord for his own. And as I understand this nice sounding word, if you're travelling and somebody says now, [00:28:03] be alert, be careful, watch out, because the next time you see a road off to the left, you must go there or you'll have missed the boat. We are not going to miss the rapture, that's not dependent upon us. But if you can think of a simple English word, which means it's the very next thing that's due to happen, and that will trigger off all the other matters of prophecy that scripture speaks about. Well, we need to consider that. Read the paragraph, please, between the rapture and the appearing. The reason I put that paragraph in is just to remind us that the Bible speaks of certain things [00:29:01] that need to happen after the rapture, which will take seven years to be fulfilled. In particular, half the period between the rapture and the appearing will take three and a half years to be fulfilled. So the whole period includes seven years. Now, the Bible doesn't actually quite say that the seven year period for which we'd have to go to Daniel 9, Daniel 12, Daniel 4, 5, 6 to 11 and scriptures like that. Scripture says that once the rapture has taken place, because the church is gone, the hope realised, because the appearing is to be triggered off, I cannot see very long being spent [00:30:10] before the events in the seven year timetable begin to start. Bible doesn't say it starts immediately after the rapture, but once the break is off, when we've gone and the Holy Spirit has been removed in his present way, I cannot see it being very long before the seven years commence. It's not the subject today, but we know certain things, terrible things will come upon the nation of Israel and at their blackest hour, when they're on the point of absolute extermination, we read Christ will appear. Now, when he appears, it will be to do many tasks [00:31:05] and because he is coming to assert himself as the judge of all, it's related not to privilege, but to responsibility for the world at large, obviously. But even believers, our relationship with the Lord Jesus when we come with him at the appearing is determined by our life and service in this world. Now, I've got about a minute, so we'll just quickly go through. The appearing of the Lord Jesus will provide rest and relief, deliverance from his enemies. There will be retribution upon his enemies. There will be recompense, due recompense for him and those who are his and on his behalf have suffered greatly. Everything will be seen [00:32:06] in proper perspective in their true colors. Everything will be revealed. Our relationship with Christ is testified in the scriptures listed there. There will be rewards which are then made manifest. You and I are responsible to the Lord Jesus as to how we live and work for him while we wait for the rapture. After the rapture, for us as individuals, we will be presented at the judgment seat of Christ. We will gladly agree with him in his assessment of what the Bible speaks of as deeds done in the body. Everything in our life and service, [00:33:05] that might encourage debate. We'll leave it there for the moment. But the Lord Jesus, who says every man shall have praise of God, he will find something commendable in the life and service of every believer who has believed that he died for them and rose again. And the public occasion when he will make a public display of his assessment by the rewards he distributes to those who are his, that is a feature not of the rapture but of the appearing. David is hovering and rightly so. Please read the notes. Please study them. And if one thing needs to register with you and me, and it's related to the appearing, not the rapture, it is that when God gives us [00:34:09] information about the future, it's with the intention that what he teaches us should regulate our life and conduct at the present time. Now that's the note on which I finished in tune with John's first epistle, chapter 3, verse 3. Because the rapture is a matter of privilege and the appearing is related to our responsibility, every time we hear prophecy, God's information about the future, history written in advance because God is in control of all things, in view of that, everyone who has this hope in him, Christ, purifies himself even as he is pure. It doesn't quite say we should purify ourselves, that is true, but what scripture says is a proper understanding [00:35:08] of the hope of the church will purify us even as he is pure. Thank you, David.