

**Will the Church Go Through the Tribulation?, Part 1**

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 1324

Now last week we talked about a wonderful even in the life of the church. The catching away of the church and meeting the Lord in the air. That was our subject for last week. The marvelous day that we're going to be caught up together to meet the Lord in the air. And so shall we ever be with the Lord. The wonderful promise of the word of God that the trumpets shall sound and the dead in Christ shall rise first and we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together to meet the Lord in the air and so forth.

This wonderful truth of the rapture of the church or the catching away of the church. Now that led us in our discussion to think seriously about a question that has arisen time and time again in the study of theology and the study of the doctrine of the last times and that is the question of does the church go through the tribulation.

The church will be caught away. There's no question about that. That's very clear in Scripture. Jesus is coming for His church. The question is, does He come for His church before the time known as the great tribulation or does He come after the tribulation. Now the word of God clearly presents the tribulation.

The Bible says that there is coming a period of time and the period is seven years, a period of time that is characterized by wars, rumors of wars, nations rising against nations, Israel is returning to the land to be redeemed in the land, a time of earthquakes, pestilence, famine, unbelief, the growth of the apostate false church, ecumenism, one world government, the rule of antichrist, fiery and furious judgments that will kill over half the population of the world and so forth.

All of these are very clearly outlined events of a period of time known as the tribulation or the time of great trouble. The question is does the church, that is we who know and love Jesus Christ and are His body, do we go through that time or do we exit before that time? Now that's a very important question.

Is the rapture the next event or is the tribulation the next event? Is Jesus going to take us out and spare us all that pain or do we have to go through it all. Well, it's a very important question. In fact, it becomes very practical. In Matthew 24, verse 3, "Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives and the disciples came to Him privately saying tell us when shall these things be and what shall be the sign of thy coming in the end of the age?" And He went on to describe all of these things, wars and rumors and

wars and earthquakes and pestilence and all these terrible things, "shall be the sign of Christ's return to set up His kingdom."

The in verse 17, we read this. "Let him who is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house. Neither let him who is in the field return back to take his clothes. And woe unto those who are with child and to those who nurse children in those days. But pray that your flight be not in the winter and neither on the Sabbath day. For then shall be great tribulations such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time known or ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened there should no flesh be saved." We'll stop there.

Jesus said there's coming a time of horrible tribulation. And when it hits, you're not even going to have time to get down into your house to take what's there. The best thing to do is run. And it's going to be too bad if you have little children to drag you down or if you're nursing your child and have to stop to do that. Pray that your flight not be in the winter which would slow you down or on the Sabbath day, which by law might cause you not to be able to travel as far and so forth.

For there's going to be tribulation like the world has never seen. Now that poses for me and for you a very practical question. As a Christian do I need to get ready for that? Because if I do, then I ought to begin to do something to get ready. Now we talk about getting ready for an atomic attack and people have bomb shelters, well, if we really have to anticipate the tribulation maybe Christians ought to be stockpiling food somewhere far away from civilization centers and maybe building little bomb shelter type things way out in the middle of nowhere. Maybe we ought to be getting ready for this if, in fact, it is to be. It's a practical problem.

But on the other hand, if Jesus is going to come back to take His church out before this happens, then all we need to do is make sure we're ready for Him. In one case we're looking Jesus and the other case we're looking for antichrist. Now this has become a big debate in the church. And I say that only in reference to the theological spectrum, not in this church, I hope. And let me give you a little theological education quickly.

Now we are obviously aware that in the Bible there is teaching about the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven. Without getting into a whole lot of theology on it, let me just say this, the kingdom is called the millennium, that being a Latin word that means a thousand and has to do with the thousand year reign of Christ. Now when you look at the kingdom or the millennium, there are three views. The first one is called the post-millennial view.

Now I just want to give you these so you'll understand perspectives. The post-millennial view is this, basically here is time running along and the cross is in here and creation is here and it's just time and it's running along. And it keeps on going and the world gets better and better and better and better, and finally the world just has the kingdom. It just gets so good that the kingdom comes. And at the

end of that time, you have the second-coming of Christ. So you have here the view that everything gets better and better and better and better, we all go waltzing into the kingdom and Jesus comes at the end of the kingdom. That's why it's called post-kingdom. It's a post-kingdom return of Christ.

This was a very popular theory before World War II. The view of post-millennialism is that the kingdom is spiritual and that it is unseen. Which is obviously not a literal kingdom. Everybody gets better and better within the frame work of Christianity and the kingdom is not an earthly material, political kingdom. It is merely a spiritual thing. The throne is in heaven. It's not on earth. And Christ returns after the kingdom. That's post-millennial.

Then there's another theory which we call ah millennial. Obviously the ah means, they don't believe in any millennium. That there is no kingdom in the future. There time just goes from creation to the coming of Christ with nothing in the middle. The kingdom is the church. We are the only kingdom and when it says in Revelation that Christ will reign for a thousand years, it doesn't mean that.

This is what's known as the non-literal view. They spiritualize the thousand years into just a nebulous description of the church age. And these are the same people incidentally who do not take a literal futuristic view of Revelation at all. They put all of Revelation either in the immediate past progressively in history or totally in the past around the time of Christ. So ah millennialism says there is no kingdom, the church is all the kingdom there will ever be.

Then we have the view called pre-millennialism. Now pre-millennialism says that there is a literal kingdom. When the Bible says the thousand years it means the thousand years. When the Bible says something, it means it unless it is obvious that it is not literal. Unless there is some reason to take it as figurative language, we accept it literally. Now let me say this, both post-millennialism and ah millennialism are spiritualized views. They take all of the information about the kingdom and spiritualize them.

For example, the Bible says clearly that during the kingdom the Messiah reigns on the throne of David in the city of Jerusalem and the law goes out of Zion. Well, what are you going to do with that? Well, you make it into a spiritual Jerusalem and a spiritual Zion, a spiritual throne, etc., etc.

The Bible says that during the kingdom the certain animals...Isaiah 11, certain animals are going to lie together. For example, a sheep and a lion, which doesn't normally happen and all of these things are going to be different. And kids can play in snake pits. What do you do with all that? You spiritualize it all the way. It's only talking about a new world.

It doesn't have to do with the literal earth. This is post-millennialism and ah millennialism. But pre-millennialism takes things literally. A literal kingdom on earth where Christ literally reigns in Jerusalem and the law does go out of Zion and it's true what happens to the animals. The curse is reversed on

the earth and so forth. And we'll get into this in specifics when we talk about the kingdom. And we'll endeavor to show you clearly from Scripture that the kingdom is a literal, earthly, real kingdom.

But pre-millennialism says this, from creation you move through the history of Israel to the cross. Then comes the coming of Christ. And we're not separating the coming, just calling it all one thing. The coming of Christ followed by the kingdom. Now the reason we believe this view is because this is the chronology of Revelation.

In Revelation the Lord returns and sets up His kingdom on earth. You see? And so we adhere to what is called the pre-millennial view. That is Christ comes before. So the first one says Christ comes after the kingdom. The next one says don't worry about it, there's no such kingdom. The next one says Christ comes before the kingdom.

We believe in pre-millennialism. That there will be a literal, earthly kingdom and Christ will come to earth to set up that kingdom. So obviously He couldn't come at the end of it, if He was going to come and set it up. Obviously, He couldn't come at the end of it if He was going to reign during it.

Now we'll cover this in more detail. Now, so we have decided that we're all pre-millennial. Amen? Good. Now, pre-millennialists are divided. This is chart two. Now we also know, let's start with creation and go through to the cross. We keep going, here's the kingdom. We're all pre-millennial now in this chart. But here we have a very interesting time. A time that is known as the tribulation.

And all pre-millennialist would agree that it happens before the kingdom. That it is Christ's activity of taking over the earth and for seven years Christ does what needs to be done to take the earth back from Satan, then He comes to reign as king for a thousand years. After the kingdom, of course, you go into eternal state.

Now, the question is let's just draw a big circle representing the tribulation. The question is, we're still pre-millennial, but does the church leave at the beginning before the tribulation, at the end after the tribulation or in the middle? That is what we call, post-trib, mid-trib, pre-trib. All right, post tribulation says that the church goes through the tribulation and we get raptured at the very end, right here. And the rapture is the same as the second-coming. So we go up to come down. Bloop, bloop, see.

Mid-trib, I'm trying to get this as simply as I can. Mid-trib says we go up in the middle. And then we remain for three and a half years to return at the second-coming. Pre-trib we go previous to the tribulation. We remain for seven years to return at the second coming.

Now the question is, which of these three is the correct view. Is the correct view, the pre-trib, mid-trib, or post-trib. Now, I'm convinced that the correct view is pre-trib. So when asked I reply I am pre-millennial, pre-tribulation. Which means, I'm committed to the fact that Jesus will come to set up a

literal earthly kingdom and that He will come seven years before the kingdom, He will come prior to the tribulation.

Now, I believe there are many reasons for a pre-tribulation rapture. And I'm going to attempt tonight to give you some of those. There are more than I could possibly give you and there are maybe more than I'll give you tonight and we'll maybe continue next time, because I don't want to talk too long, because that'll just confuse you because some of it is heavy stuff.

All right, let me say this at the very beginning. In any kind of a study like this, to even approach this kind of a study you have to have some assistance. And I want to just publicly acknowledge the faithfulness of men of God who lived before me with great brilliant minds who were spirit led men who studied the Scripture and wrote in several books the reasons for a pre-tribulation rapture.

I have certain ideas of my own to contribute but on the main, I am indebted to other men, particularly one man, Dr. John Walvoord, who is the President of Dallas Seminary, has written extensively on the subject of the pre-tribulation rapture and in fact, if you're interested in pursuing the question the book entitled *The Rapture Question* is without question the finest book on the subject.

Now there are three general areas that we want to talk about that I believe indicate a pre-tribulation rapture. The nature of the church, the nature of the tribulation and the nature of the second coming. The nature of the church indicates a pre-trib rapture I feel. So does the nature of the tribulation and so does the nature of the second coming.

Let's begin with the nature of the church. Now if the church is going to be leaving, maybe we'd better leave our little chart up there, if the church is going to be leaving, then it has to be a unique identity. The point being this, if the church goes in a kind of a special little rapture just for them, that indicates that they're something special.

We must then consider the nature of the church. This is critical. Now to begin with many people have said the church and Israel are the same. If the church and Israel are the same, then you cannot have a pre-tribulation rapture. Because if everybody went then, and that was the end, there wouldn't be any refining process. There wouldn't be any redemption of Israel going on here. And if there are to be saints in the tribulation they would have to go when the rest of the saints go.

Now we'll cover that in some detail. Now let's look at the term church. If the term church includes the saints of all the ages, if the term church "includes Israel and the church," then we all have to go through the tribulation. Why? Because Israel's going to be in the tribulation. It's called the time of who's trouble? Jacob's trouble. So if the church and Israel is all the same, then there can't be a pre-tribulation rapture. We've all got to go through it together if we're one in the same.

And this is the argument of the post-tribulation view, that the church and Israel are the same. That we are spiritual Israel. That we become the Israel of God. And so then we all go through the tribulation and we all just have that up and down thing there at the second coming.

However, if the church applies to a special group of people, not to be confused with the national Israel, then we can allow for a rapture here and there will still be some saints left in the tribulation. They will be redeemed during that time. So if the church is different, then the church, watch, can have a beginning here and an ending here. It can be an entity all itself. It can exist singularly if it is, in fact, a unique and separate body.

So the key then beginningly, the key to this understanding is, is the church a unique group? Now I want to give you some thoughts on that that I think will be helpful. First of all, the meaning of the word ekklesia. The word ekklesia is the word for church. It comes really from ekoletō to call out or called out once. It has four meanings in the New Testament, four meanings.

First of all, it is used to speak of an assembly of people. That's a very general use. Just ekklesia just means a group of people. It can be political. For example, in Acts 19:39 it just talks about a bunch of citizens gathered together. It can be used for people gathered together for worship as it is in the book of Hebrews or it can be used to speak as in Acts Chapter 7 of Israel as a group of people called out of Egypt.

Just in a very general sense, speaking of a group of people called out and gathered together under some special purpose. But secondly, the word ekklesia moved from its general meaning to some very specific things and it came to mean an assembly of Christians in a local area. For example, in Acts 8, verses 1 and 3, we find that the word church there speaks of a very, very distinct group of people in a very specific local area. It's not general at all.

At that time, there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem. So there the church has to do with a specific group of people in a specific location. It is thus used as well in the 11<sup>th</sup> Chapter of Acts in verses 22 and I think also in verse 26 where it talks about...yes, in verse 26, the church at Antioch. So then it came to mean a specific group of believers.

Let me add this too. But along that line it is also used to speak of a group of such churches. So one church is a church, one local assembly of believers and several local assemblies put together makes up the church. Then moving even further the word ekklesia is used to speak of all professing Christians. And we use it that way today, don't we?

We say the church, that's a very broad term. And it's used like that in Acts Chapter 12. It says, "Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church." And there it just used church in terms

of Christianity in general. Fourthly, it is not only used in a general sense just of anybody who gets together who is called out and called apart, but it is used as an assembly of the local congregation or a several assemblies or the professing church itself.

But fourthly and most significantly it is used to refer to the body of Christ. The true church, those who are truly redeemed, born again, baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body. This is basic. The church then, in its purest definition is the redeemed saints. And it is used as such in the New Testament.

Now let me hasten to say this. Four different uses, it is used in relation to Israel, watch this. It is used in relation to Israel only in the sense as stated in number one. Only as Israel is a called out group, and that having to do with the fact they were called out of Egypt. It is not used in terms of Israel as the body of Christ, as professing Christianity or as a local congregation of believers.

The only time the word *ekklisia* from *ekoletō* is ever used of Israel, it is used in the sense of them being as a called out group in a very general sense. Dr. Walvoord says this and I quote, "A study of every use of *ekklisia* in the New Testament shows that all references where *ekklisia* is used in the New Testament in reference to people in the Old Testament, can be classified in the general meaning.

It is never used of an assembly or body of saints except in reference to saints of the present age. So the word church is never used to speak of Israel as a group of saints. It only uses the term to speak of the whole nation being called out having nothing to do with whether some were saints and some were ain'ts. Now what is all that saying?

All that is saying this, the church is not and does not include Israel. The church includes some Jews, a remnant of believing Jews. But I, as a member of the body of Christ, am not one with Abraham in that sense. Abraham and Isaac and Jacob were saints of God. They are not members of the body of Christ, the church. The church is distinct. The term church is never used in terms of its distinctness in reference to Israel. They are different.

Now, that's basic because if the church is different than Israel, then the church can leave before the tribulation and Israel will still be around to be redeemed. Let me take you to a passage in Matthew 16 and give you a second reason underneath this subject of the nature of the church. Matthew 16, and I can tell I'm not going to get anywhere. It's okay, we'll do it next time.

Matthew 16:18, just want to pull one statement. Jesus was having a conversation with the disciples and Peter said, "thou art the Christ the Son of the living God," and Jesus said in verse 17, "blessed are you Simon son of Jonas or John, for flesh and blood hasn't revealed that unto to you, but my Father who is in heaven." Then verse 18, "Thy say also unto thee, thou art Peter and upon this rock," not referring to Peter, but most likely to Peter's confession, the rock of his confession. Watch this, "I

will build my church." What tense? Future.

Here is the first reference in the New Testament to the church and it is a future effort on the part of Christ. The church then is not to be confused with Israel. Israel had long existed. Jesus does not say I will add to my church. Israel is not the church. "I will build my church." Here is the first reference in Scripture to the church and it is totally and purely future, future.

Notice something else, "and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." In other words, Satan will never stifle the church. That's very important. Go to Revelation 13:7 and I'll show you why it's important. Revelation 13:7, Satan and Hell would not prevail against the church. Revelation 13:7, here we are in the tribulation. Watch. "And it was given unto him to make war with the saints," this is the beast, "and to overcome them." Jesus said, "the gates of Hell would not overcome the church."

That's why we're convinced that this cannot be the church in view in the tribulation. Let me take you a step further.

Go to Revelation 17, this is just off the cuff. I just thought of it. In Revelation 17, we have the false church, it's called Mystery Babylon, in verse 5, the great, the mother of harlots, the prostitute. If the true church is a bride, the false church is a prostitute. And he goes all through the description of this church and the one that is running the church, verse 3, "carried me away in the spirit to the wilderness and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet colored beast." Here is the false church under the control of the beast.

Jesus said, not Satan, not the gates of Hell would prevail against the church. During the tribulation Satan and the beast prevail against the saints and against the false church. That's why I believe you cannot have the true church in the tribulation or it would be under the thumb of Satan and his ruler. Because the antichrist during the tribulation will rule how much? The whole what? World.

And I believe Christ would remove His church before He would make untrue His original statement that the gates of Hell could not prevail against the church. All right, let's go to another passage. Acts Chapter 11, and here is another reason that I believe the nature of the church forbids its presence in the tribulation. Acts 11:15, And Peter is reporting back to the Jerusalem council what happened with Cornelius and the Gentiles. And he says some very important things here.

Verse 15, "And as I began to speak," Peter was talking to Cornelius, "the Holy Spirit fell on them," watch, "as on us at the," what, "beginning of," what, "the church." And when did the Holy Spirit fall on them? Acts 2, On the day of what? Pentecost. That's when the church began.

Peter says "he fell on us as at the beginning. Then remembered I, the word of the Lord that He said. John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit." And you see the



baptism of the Holy Spirit is what places you into the church, isn't it? 1 Corinthians 12:13. So Peter acknowledges that the church had a beginning and he says it was at the beginning when what happened to Cornelius happened to us.

We go back to Acts 2, and they all spoke with tongues and the Spirit of God baptized it, we know what happened. It was on the day of Pentecost. That's when the beginning was. Israel had long ago existed not to be confused with the church, which began on the day of Pentecost. It was something brand new. In 1 Corinthians 12:13, let me just read you that verse since it's very basic to our point.

1 Corinthians 12, verse 13, "For by one Spirit were we all baptized into one body." That was the beginning of the church, the body of Christ. A new thing was formed and Peter acknowledged that it had a beginning and the beginning was Pentecost. This is a new concept. And you know, there's a clear distinction between the church and Israel even from here on out. In 1 Corinthians 10:32, a verse that you ought to become familiar with because it's very basic to this study. Listen to this, "give no offense neither to the Jews nor to the Greeks nor to the church of God." Do you notice there three distinct groups?

The Jews, the Gentiles and the church, always separate even though there are believing Jews and believing Gentiles in the church, it is not the same as Israel. The church is a distinct unit. Begun at Pentecost, ends at the rapture, we're a parenthesis. God started dealing with Israel, Israel rejected Him, He moved to the Gentiles, called out a group, when He's finished with them, the fullness of the Gentiles closes it, we leave, God goes right back to dealing with Israel again.

The Jew never conceived of this kind of relationship. In Colossians 1:26-27, for example, it says "even the mystery which hath been hidden from ages and generations." The Jew didn't know about the church. It's not made manifest to its saints. What mystery? The end of verse 27, "the mystery which is Christ," what, "in you." No Jew understood that because in the Old Testament, there was no concept of Messiah indwelling. That was the unique character of the church.

The Old Testament never saw Messiah in you at all. They had no such concept. The church is unique, it is distinct. In John 14, verse 20, "And that day,"... "At that day Jesus said you shall know that I am in my Father and ye in me and I in you." Now watch, when were they going to know that? "At that day," they didn't know it yet, they couldn't conceive of it yet, but they would know the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended. And the same thing is indicated in John 17:23, "I in them and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one."

And so the promise in verse 14 and Jesus prays "Father make it happen." This unique body indwelt by the very presence of the Messiah. And so the church is distinct, it is separate. Now there are some other things and I'm just going to give you a couple of these and then we'll leave the rest for next time, the meaning of Romans 11. We want to look at that for a moment.

I can tell this is one you're going to need the tape on if you want to review. Romans 11:17, incidentally verse 6 talks about Israel being blessed, verse 16 of Romans 11. Israel being blessed. Then pick it up in 17, "And if some of the branches were broken off," that talks about Israel being broken off, "the trunk is the root of blessing." Israel was plugged into God's blessing, but Israel got cut off. They got cut off because of what? Unbelief. "And thou being a wild olive tree were grafted in." Who's that? Gentiles. Israel was cut off from the root of blessing because of unbelief. Gentiles were grafted in.

So he says, "you were grafted in among them and with them partakest to the root and fatness of the olive tree, but don't get proud about it." Don't be proud, verse 19 and say "the branches were broken off that I might be grafted in." Well because of unbelief they were broken off. And just remember you only stand by faith. Don't be high-minded but fear, "for if God spared not the natural branches take heed lest He also spare not thee."

Now look at verse 24, "For if thou were cut out of the olive tree," now watch, "and grafted in contrary to nature, how much more shall these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree." Now watch, Israel was cut off and new branches, the church grafted in. The church someday will be severed, Israel will be regrafted in. Does that tell you there is a difference between Israel and the church? Of course it does.

The church has in the place of blessing been grafted in. The day will come when the Lord takes the church. Israel will be grafted back in during the tribulation and salvation will come to Israel.

Verse 25, "I would not brethren," here he explains it spiritually, "I would not brethren, you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own conceits, blindness in part has happened to Israel only until the fullness of the Gentiles." Only until all of the branches have been grafted in, the church is complete.

Then 26, "Then all Israel," what, "shall be saved." Grafted back in again. Now the very fact that Paul takes pains to make a distinction between the church and Israel indicates there is a distinction. And the history of Israel in the trunk of blessing is at the beginning and the end of God's dealing and the grafting in is somewhere in the middle. It began at Pentecost, it ends at the rapture and Israel's grafted back in.

So the very statements of Romans 11, indicate that there is a difference and that the church has parenthetical character. Another point under this first heading of the nature of the church is the rapture. Now we saw last week that the first recorded promise of the rapture makes very clear the nature of the event. You'll remember that in John 14, and we'll just briefly review a couple of thoughts from last time, but in John 14, we remember that Jesus made the promise of the rapture.

In verse 33 of Chapter 13, you remember He said I'm going to go away and you can't come where I'm going to go and they were all broken up. They wanted to be with Him so much. In verse 1, He says, "stop letting your hearts be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me." Now watch, here comes the promise. "In my Father's house there are many mansions, if it weren't 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."

Now Jesus says, don't be troubled, because I'm going to come and get you and take you to the Father's house. That is absolutely foreign to the Jesus mind. The Jew had no concept of such an event. All the Jew expected was Messiah comes to earth, sets up an earthly kingdom. He had no concept of leaving and going to the Father's house. In fact, it was so new, that they stood there dumb-founded. Thomas said Lord, we don't even know what you're talking about, verse 5. "Where are you going? How do you get there?" What's this?

Since when are you going? We thought the Messiah came, stayed, set up the kingdom. This is new. Now mark this, throughout the Old Testament, God never ever promised this to Israel. At no time does God say to Israel, I'm going to come and get you and take you to the Father's house. Always, Messiah will come and reign on the earth in the promised kingdom.

So here you have something completely different than the national hope of Israel. It must be a distinct event. And in 1 Corinthians 15, which we saw last time, the same thing is brought out in verse 51. "I show you a mystery, we shall not all sleep." What is a mystery? Something what? Hidden. Israel didn't know about this. "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment. In a twinkling of an eye at the last trump, the trumpet shall sound, the dead shall be raised incorruptible and we shall all be changed." This is a mystery.

Resurrection isn't a mystery. They knew about resurrection. That was in many places in the Old Testament. Isaiah 26:19, Daniel 12:2, they knew about resurrection. What they didn't know about was rapture, translation without death. They hadn't any concept of that.

And so you see there must be a difference. The Jew had no concept of the rapture. This is not for him. This is for the church. You say well maybe the rapture and the return happened together. It can't. They can't. I don't believe in the up and down quickie. You say why? Well, because of this. Let me give you this. Think about this one. Ready?

How many are going to be changed in the rapture? "We shall all be changed." Okay. How many of the ungodly are going to be destroyed in the second-coming? All. So if you've got all believers changed and you got the rapture and the return at the same moment, the kingdom next, you got all believers changed and all unbelievers destroyed, who is going to be around in the kingdom to do the

gardening that Amos talks about?

Amos 9, he says "there's going to be tilling of the ground, raising crops, plowing, planting vineyards, gardens, eating of the fruit. Men are going to sit into their vineyards and share their grapes with their neighbors." Who's going to be sitting around? Everybody's glorified or dead.

You've got to have a period of time between the...when it says all be changed it can't mean all the saints of all the ages or there won't be any redeemed saints during the tribulation to go into the kingdom. Plus let me give you worse problem. How do you get a worldwide rebellion in the kingdom if you've got no ungodly going in and only translated saints going in?

How do you get Satan loose from leading a worldwide rebellion. You've got nobody to lead. You must have, now watch, you must have living physical beings in the kingdom. You've got to have a little child to lead that menagerie of animals around. Now where are you going to get unless there's some saints redeemed during a period between the rapture and the return?

Therefore we believe the rapture must come before the return and at the beginning of the tribulation. Well, 1 Thessalonians 4, look at that and we'll close with that one. 1 Thessalonians 4, verse 13, this describes the rapture. "I would not have you to be ignorant brethren concerning them who are asleep." Now they were worried because some Christians had died and they thought they might be second class citizens and miss out on the rapture.

And so they go down and they say in verse 16, "The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, the trump of God, the dead in Christ shall rise first." Not only are they not going to miss, they're going to go first. This is the rapture. The dead bodies rise to meet the souls that have been with the Lord. Remember we said that if a person dies now, his spirit immediately is in the presence of Christ?

Later on his body will be a glorified body resurrected to meet his spirit already with Christ. So the dead bodies rise to meet the spirits, then "we who are left alive and remain are caught together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

All right, there's the rapture. Everybody goes. See? Don't worry about the dead ones, they go to. "Wherefore comfort one another with these words." Now immediately the question is going to come up, well, when does this happen? Look at verse 1 of Chapter 5. "But of the times and the seasons brethren, you have no need that I write unto you." Wow what a statement.

"Of the times and the seasons you have no need that I write unto you," Jesus said, that I better make sure I'm not having...I'm not up on the roof without my bags packed and I'd better make sure that I've got all my clothes together, and I better make sure it isn't winter and I've got food and I better make

sure my wife doesn't have a baby and that I don't have little children because it's going to be hot and heavy and fast and I'll barely escape with my life if I do. Paul would never have said "comfort one another with these words and you don't need to know when it's going to come."

That would be the height of ridiculous statements. Oh don't worry about it, it's nothing. You don't have any need to know. All it is, is tribulation that's going to realize the ultimate disaster of the world. That would be a foolish statement of the "times and seasons brethren you have no need that I write unto you."

Well, that would contradict what Jesus said if we're going through the tribulation. Now watch what he says. "For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord comes like a thief in the night. For when they shall say peace and safety then sudden destruction cometh upon them as travail upon a woman with child and they shall not escape." But watch this, who shall not escape? What is the pronoun? They shall not escape.

Watch verse 4, "But," what's the pronoun, "ye brethren are not in darkness that the day should overtake you as a thief." You see a difference? Somebody's going to get it when the day of the Lord comes, "but you brethren aren't going to be there." It's not going to overtake you. Why? You are sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of the darkness.

Look at verse 8-9. He says, just live the Christian life. "Go out, put on the breastplate of faith and love and helmet the hope of salvation" and then what do you do? Watch this, "relax," verse 9, "for God hath not appointed us to," what, "wrath. But to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ." The word salvation the Greek means deliverance. He hasn't appointed us to wrath, but to deliverance who died for us that whether we wake or sleep, we should live, what, together with Him. We're not appointed to judgment, we're appointed to be with Him. That's where we're going to be.

And while the judgment hits the world, whether a believer has died or whether he's alive, we're going to be with Jesus. I'll tell you friends, I am not looking for antichrist. I'm looking for Christ. And then in 11, he says, "Wherefore comfort yourselves together." Now there's no comfort in going through the tribulation, believe me.

Only possible for comfort if we're going to escape. Now there's a few reasons and we'll take some more next time. The fact that the church is called a bride. The fact that the tribulation is especially designed for Israel. We're going to get into Daniel 70 weeks next time and find out what those 70 weeks are. And I believe when we're done and we'll be done next time, I hope that you're as excited when we're done as I am right now about the fact that I'm not going through the tribulation.

In fact, just in closing a verse that I jotted down here, Matthew 24:48, let me just read it to you, don't even look it up. Just listen. Matthew 24:48, in the Olivet discourse, Jesus is giving the discussion here

and using parables. And He says this, "But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My Lord delayeth His coming." What kind of servant says that? Evil servant.

You say John, you mean it's an evil thing to say that Jesus is going to delay His coming and we're going to go through all kinds of judgment? Yes, I think it is. You say, why do you believe it's an evil servant? Because beloved I believe that if you remove the eminent return of Jesus Christ, you remove perhaps the greatest motivation for service to Christ that a believer has.

The Bible says in 1 John 3, in verse 2 these things. "Beloved it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is and every man that hath this hope in himself does," what, "purifies himself." And you take away the blessed hope, you take away the greatest impedes to purity and the life of the believer.

I serve Jesus Christ, friends, because one of these days, He is going to split heaven with His coming and He is going to say "behold I come quickly and my reward is with me to give to every man according as his works shall be," and when He gets here and I go to meet Him in the air, I want to hear "well done, good and faithful servant." And I serve Him because I'm looking for Him to come.

Listen the apostle Paul even said "I serve Jesus Christ because I know He's coming." 2 Corinthians 5:9, the judgment seat of Christ. I'm looking for Jesus and because I'm living every moment as if He could come in the next, I pray God it's purifying my life.

Let's pray. Father, we have just begun really tonight to see some things in reference to the return of our blessed Christ. Lord, I believe in my heart that Jesus is going to reign in a real kingdom on this earth and when He told the disciples they were going to reign with Him, He wasn't kidding them. When He promised to Israel a kingdom, that He meant it and when He promised to the church that some day we'd come back with Him in the clouds that he'd return with His saints to reign, Father, that that's what He meant.

And Father since the earth is His anyway, it's right that He would gain it back. And Father, I also believe in the Bible that there's a tribulation that You've told us about and You detailed it and most of the book of Revelation, but I also believe that You said that we were not appointed under wrath. That there's no need for that kind of a judgment in the Christian's life because all of our judgment was taken at Calvary. To get it again would only be to double the judgment and to minimize the cross.

So Father, I'm not looking for the antichrist, and I'm not looking for the tribulation. I'm looking for Jesus. And Father, I thank you that you made me in Your grace a part of the church, that unique body that you called out when Israel said no to the king. Father, I'm glad too that one day after You've taken the church out, You're going to go back to working with Israel and Israel's going to get saved and get grafted in again.

Father, we pray that there wouldn't be anybody in this place who isn't looking for Jesus and isn't ready for the moment when He comes. We pray in His blessed name. Amen.

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