

“Come, Lord Jesus!”:
Praying for Christ's Return
Sermon Notes

- God's ultimate promise to his people is a prophecy - just as certain as Christ's 1st coming is the truth of his 2nd

**Eschatology is not a distraction from our mission, it's the destination of our mission, so may we never fail to...*

1. Preach the Bible's final promise (v.20a)

2. Pray the Bible's final prayer (v.20b)

Community Group Study Guide
For the Week of August 29th - September 4th

Getting Started

1. Have you come to the place of holding clear, biblical convictions concerning the rapture¹ of the church? Do you believe it to be a scriptural doctrine? If so, do you believe the Bible teaches the rapture to be a pre-, mid-, or post-tribulational² event? Explain.

Digging Deeper

2. The doctrine of the rapture of the church is clearly taught in Holy Scripture. In essence, it refers to Christ's return for his people with an accent on their being "gathered" (2 Thessalonians 2:1), "taken to" (John 14:3), or "caught up together" with him (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Thus, any discussion or debate among believers ought not to be with reference to the fact of the rapture, but rather to its timing relative to the tribulation. Read through these passages together as a group, noting not only their focus on the coming of Christ, but on the gathering of his people to him.

Open Your Bible to 1 Corinthians 15:50-58...

3. In 1 Corinthians 15:50-58, though none of the typical terms describing the rapture are featured here (see question #2), it's clear enough that Paul is indeed describing this future event. Read carefully through the paragraph. What truths do we learn about the rapture? What grim prospect is over for believers at this moment (vv.54-57)? In the same moment, what stunning change will take place for each believer (vv.51-53)? What is Paul's practical exhortation in view of this incredible reality that awaits those who are in Christ - i.e., what clear, immediate application is there for us as Christians (v.58)?
4. As mentioned above, some believers hold to what's known as the pre-tribulational rapture of the church (the view that Jesus will gather those who belong to him prior to the beginning of the tribulation – thus being spared this gruesome future period in world history). Some common arguments for the pre-trib rapture include: the promise of exemption from divine wrath (1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9 and Revelation 3:10), the necessity of an interval between the rapture of the church and the second coming of

1 The English word "rapture" comes from the Latin word *raptura* which is a translation of the Greek term *harpazo* (this is the word that Paul uses in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 describing how the church will be "caught up" to meet the Lord in the air at his coming).

2 The tribulation (also known as "the Great Tribulation" - Matthew 24:21; Revelation 7:14), is described in the Bible as a period of unparalleled hardship and intense suffering prior to the return of Christ. Known in dispensational theology as Daniel's 70th Week (Daniel 9:27, Revelation 12:6 and Revelation 13:5), it is commonly held to occur during the final seven years preceding the glorious appearing of Christ.

Christ³, and the sudden, imminent nature of many of the prophecies of Jesus' return.⁴ Evaluate these arguments, discussing their strengths and weaknesses.

5. Another widely-held position concerning the rapture of the church is what's known as the post-tribulational view. For our purposes, we'll include the mid-trib as well as the pre-wrath views here as well.⁵ Some common arguments for the post-trib rapture include: Jesus' words in the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24:29-31), Paul's assurance that relief will come for the suffering church at the same time that Jesus pours out a fiery retribution on her enemies (2 Thessalonians 1:5-10), and Paul's counsel to the Thessalonians that they had not missed the rapture and not to expect it until the great apostasy and the revealing of the man of lawlessness (2 Thessalonians 2:1-5). Evaluate these arguments, discussing their strengths and weaknesses.

6. Article 9 of the EFCA Statement of Faith reads:

"We believe in the personal, bodily and glorious return of our Lord Jesus Christ. The coming of Christ, at a time known only to God, demands constant expectancy and, as our blessed hope, motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission."

What are the three non-negotiable elements that we hold as a Free Church concerning our Lord's return (sentence one)? Why are these such an irreducible minimum for our faith? Since it will occur at a time known only to God, what does the coming of Christ "demand" (sentence two)? Do you live this way? Why or why not? What are the three practical motivations that flow from the blessed hope of Jesus' return (sentence two)? Are these personally motivating to you? Again, why or why not?

3 As Dr. Paul Feinberg explains: "If all righteous are glorified before the millennium, and all wicked are excluded from the kingdom, where do the people in non-glorified bodies come from to populate the millennium?...It is necessary to separate the rapture of the church from the second advent of Christ because of the need of an interval for people to be saved, so that they can enter into the kingdom in natural, non-glorified bodies." See *Three Views on the Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulational?* Zondervan Publishing House: Grand Rapids, MI. (1984) 1996. pp.73, 86.

4 In other words, those who hold this position understand the rapture to a "signless" event that requires the fulfillment of no further prophecies before it occurs, see: Mark 13:37; Philippians 4:5; James 5:8; and Revelation 22:20.

5 The reason for doing so isn't to suggest that these three views are indistinguishable from one another (they're not), but rather because none of them require the rapture of the church prior to - or at the start of – the tribulation.