

Review

We are immersed in our study of the Olivete Discourse, an end-times briefing that Jesus gave to four of His disciples on the Mount of Olives. He was talking about the Tribulation period, specifically about the time when the antichrist walks into the temple and claims to be god. At that point, Jesus warned, the Jews who fail to worship the antichrist will be hated by all nations. Two thirds of them will be killed, and many of them will be hiding out in the wilderness of Judea, presumably in the city of Petra.

His most recent statement was about His return to earth, reassuring them that when the Second Coming arrives, the whole world will know it.

Now, as we pick up in verse 28, He makes a strange statement...

24:28 The Corpse And Vultures

This one sentence is one of the biggest mysteries of anything Jesus says in the Bible. There are so many different interpretations that we could easily spend the next hour giving brief outlines of what various Bible teachers believe about it.

Basically, the three general areas that people try to fit this passage into are:

1) The rapture of the church. This is because the parallel passage in Luke has some context and language that would seem to fit the rapture scenario.

2) The battle of Armageddon. This is because in Revelation 19, when Jesus smites the nations who have come to battle against him, all the birds are told,

Rev. 19:17-18 ...“Come, assemble for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great.”

We read that as a result, all the birds will be filled with their flesh (Rev. 19:21).

3) The third interpretation is that this is simply a proverb, in the same way we might say, "Where there's smoke, there's fire." If that is the

case, then the application would be in the context of the world-wide persecution of the Jews by the armies of the antichrist. Remember that we discussed last week how the antichrist will enter the temple and commit the abomination of desolation, claiming to be god. And that on that day, a world-wide persecution of the Jews will begin, lasting three and a half years. They will chase the Jews to the ends of the earth, hunting them down.

Which interpretation do I lean towards? At various times, I have seen validity in all three positions. But at this time, I'm leaning toward the third interpretation, because it seems to best fit the context of the passage. (But of course that certainly doesn't mean I'm right!)

There is only one thing about which I can be truly dogmatic with this verse. And that is "vultures" is a mistranslation based on an assumption. The word (Gk: ah-et-OS) means, "eagles," but since eagles are not thought to be eaters of carrion, then the translators say, "Oh, it must mean vultures then." But I have seen with my own eyes a bald eagle eating roadkill goose on a highway in Oregon. Not to mention, that if Jesus MEANT "vultures," then He would have SAID "vultures."

24:29-30 The Second Coming Of Christ

At the end of the Great Tribulation, Jesus promises that He is going to return. Many of the prophets have written of that day (Isa. 13:9-13; Joel 2:31; Acts 2:19-21; etc.), when the sun, moon, and stars are dark, and the day of the Lord comes, when the wicked are punished for their iniquity.

All the tribes of the earth will mourn, but for two different reasons. Zechariah writes the words of Jesus, saying,

Zech. 12:10-12 ...they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn. In that day there will be great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning of Haddadrimmon in the plain of Megiddo. The land will mourn, every family by itself..."

And so the Jews will mourn in repentance, that they killed their Messiah two thousand years before. But the rest of the nations will

mourn over their dead, who were killed fighting Christ at Armageddon.

24:31 Gathering His Elect

When Christ returns, those who are His will be gathered together from all over the world, and Israel will finally live with the peace that has been promised them for so long.

Some people use this passage as their "proof" that the rapture happens at the end of the Tribulation. But as you study out this subject, it becomes clear that the rapture of the church happens before the Tribulation even begins.

This morning, before we close, I'd like to spend a few minutes giving you some of the reasons that I firmly believe in the pre-Tribulation rapture of the church. Because of time constraints, we won't be going into a lot of detail, but if you'd like to delve into this subject, I highly recommend getting the tapes on the various passages to which I refer.

The Rapture

If you're not familiar with the concept of the Rapture, it is an event prophesied in the Bible as an event when believers don't die, but are caught up in the air to be with Jesus. As Paul said,

1Cor. 15:51-52 Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

The big debate is when this rapture will occur.

1) After The Church

The book of Revelation is our definitive work and timeline on the Tribulation period. Chapters two and three of that book are addressed specifically to the church. But then chapter four says, "after these things," and the church is not mentioned again, except when they are seen in heaven.

The interesting thing is that chapter four begins with John saying,
Rev. 4:1 After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard,

**like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said,
“Come up here...”**

At the end of the church age, a trumpet will sound, and the church will be caught up to heaven. This happens before the Tribulation in Revelation.

2) Like A Thief

Last week, we learned that Jesus Christ will return exactly three and a half years after the antichrist commits the abomination of desolation (Dan. 12:10). But Jesus also said to those who believe in Him,

Luke 12:40 “You too, be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour that you do not expect.”

If the rapture doesn't happen until after the Great Tribulation begins, then I know exactly when to expect Jesus. But if the Lord is coming to catch the church up to Him before these events begin, then that is a time we do not expect.

3) The Prophetic Calendar

Now, this one is a bit difficult to comprehend if you haven't studied the seven feasts, but for those that have, I'll put this in.

The feasts that God gave to Israel pointed to Jesus Christ, and those that have been fulfilled by Him have been fulfilled in order, on the actual day.

Jesus was crucified on Passover. He was buried when Unleavened Bread began. He was raised from the dead on the Feast of Firstfruits. He gave birth to the church on the day of Pentecost.

What is the next holiday on the Jewish calendar? The feast of trumpets, which foretells of the rapture.

After that comes the Day of Atonement, which marks the end of the Tribulation when Christ returns, and then the Feast of Tabernacles, which tells of Christ's reign on earth for a thousand years.

In short, trumpets come before Yom Kippur. The rapture happens before Christ returns at the end of the Great Tribulation.

4) The Antichrist

Another reason I firmly believe that the rapture has to happen be-

fore the Tribulation is that the antichrist is revealed at the beginning of the Tribulation. But Paul told the Thessalonians that the antichrist is currently being restrained from being revealed.

2Th. 2:6-7 And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way.

Who is the "he" that restrains? This someone has been restraining evil on the earth from the days of Paul, and for the last 2,000 years. He is the Holy Spirit, working through the church, to be salt and light to a corrupted world. But when the church is raptured, He will be taken out of the way, and will no longer be restraining the spirit of antichrist. And so the antichrist can't be revealed until the church is raptured!

5) Comfort One Another

There are at least another dozen reasons that I could cover, but we've only got time for this one more. And that is, those who teach that the church will be present on the earth during the Tribulation are saying that we are going to be here for seven years of hell on earth. World War III, world-wide famine, death and disease, devastating earthquakes, one third of the trees and all of the grass are destroyed by fire, etc.

But as you consider this, listen to what Paul has to say about the rapture. He says that we...

1Th. 4:17-18 ...will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.

People who tell me that the rapture is going to happen during or after the Great Tribulation have it wrong. The rapture is a teaching of comfort, not of terror. Be comforted today knowing that the Lord Jesus Christ can catch us up to be with Him in the clouds at any minute.

Next Sunday, we'll talk about why I believe the rapture is imminent and why we are very likely the last generation of the church.