

END TIMES: ANTICHRIST CENTERED FEAR VERSUS CHRIST CENTERED HOPE

It has been famously suggested that,

No passage of scripture directs Christians to prepare for the antichrist but numerous passages instruct them to await Christ's return. And that therefore it is problematic if your end time expectations are antichrist centered (fear) rather than Christ centered (hope).

Indeed we are told to wait for the coming of Christ, but which is after the tribulation of those days:

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 30 Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory (Matthew 24:29; Mark 13:24).

Firstly, rapture is not the same as the coming of Christ but it is the same as the first resurrection because:

1. Rapture of saints who are alive does not precede resurrection of those who are dead in Christ: *For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. (1 Thes. 4:15-17).* From this we know that there is a problem when the word rapture is used more often than resurrection. The word resurrection appears 41 times while rapture appears only in this verse. But the latter has been used more often than the former and has, as a result, unwittingly shifted the focus of the believer from understanding the correct order of events. Rapture and the resurrection of the righteous happen by the same last trumpet, but the dead are raised first before we who are alive are caught up together with them!
2. The first resurrection includes the saints who are beheaded during the great tribulation. Since the first resurrection takes place at the same time as rapture and by the same trumpet, then idea that we are going to be raptured before the tribulation is false, unfounded and, at best, a misleading myth, which creates a false sense of hope thereby making its believer unprepared for the coming seasons. *And I saw thrones,*

and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. 5 But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years (Rev. 20:4-6).

Secondly, neither Christ nor the apostles promise more than one coming of Christ. Although in one place He apparently comes without resurrected saints (*Matthew 24:30; Rev. 6:14-17; Luke 21:27; Mark 13:26*) while in another, He comes with them, thereby appearing to be two different runs, this is explained as follows:

When He appears on the clouds, He doesn't come down in a single dive. He comes gradually. This is evidenced by the following:

1. The scripture does not say *He will come on the clouds of heaven*. Rather it uses the relative sense of speech, namely, they shall see him coming (*Matthew 24:29-30; Mark 13:24-27; Revelation 6:12-17*). There is therefore a difference between being seen coming and coming in one dive. But as for us, we shall not mourn like them given that we expect Him. Instead, our perspective will be different because we shall see ourselves in Him and Him in us. *Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. (1 John 3:2).*
2. After He is seen coming, He will send His angels to the earth with trumpets (*Matthew 24:31; Mark 13:27; Rev 7-10*). When you send, you do not go. Having sent the angels to the earth, means He will remain on the clouds of heaven until these delegated angels have completed the gathering (see parable of weeds *Matthew 13:24-30; 37-43* and the work of the angelic advance team in Revelation 7-10. This will be elaborated further in a future short piece titled, *The Gathering*).
3. So when the last trumpet here sounds, rapture will take place. This is why it is understandable when the scripture doesn't say He will come but rather He will descend to cause the first resurrection and rapture. He will therefore descend from the position where He was seen coming to a given height in the air where we will meet Him and be with Him always (*1 Thes. 4:16-17*).

4. After the rapture (the sounding of the last trumpet, which is also the 7th), the wrath of God is now released upon the sons of disobedience: *Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ... and Your wrath has come, And the time of the dead, that they should be judged, And that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, And those who fear Your name, small and great, And should destroy those who destroy the earth.*" (Rev. 11:15-18).
5. Then at the fullness of time, Christ returns together with His resurrected saints from the position in the air, to which He descended earlier to during rapture. He destroys the power of the antichrist and his armies, and the antichrist and false prophet are captured alive and thrown in the lake of fire. After this is when He rules with us in the 1,000 year reign on earth (Rev. 19 & 20).

That means, therefore, that if we have understanding, we will get ready, especially, when we spiritually discern that the man of sin and the great tribulation are close.

And the scripture indeed tells us to prepare for the antichrist, more specifically to those who are alive in the very last days. It says,

To the church:

1. Do not accept the mark of the beast because you will be damned to hell if you do: *Then a third angel followed them, shouting, "Anyone who worships the beast and his statue or who accepts his mark on the forehead or on the hand 10 must drink the wine of God's anger. It has been poured full strength into God's cup of wrath. And they will be tormented with fire and burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and the Lamb. 11 The smoke of their torment will rise forever and ever, and they will have no relief day or night, for they have worshiped the beast and his statue and have accepted the mark of his name."* (Rev. 14:9-11).
2. We are called upon to endure the times patiently: *Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand. 10 Anyone who is destined for prison will be taken to prison. Anyone destined to die by the sword will die by the sword. This means that God's holy people must endure persecution patiently and remain faithful* (Rev. 13:9-10).
3. To watch ourselves not to be overwhelmed by drunkenness, a partying lifestyle and the cares of this life (Luke 21:34). The cares of this life like paying school fees for our children, adventurous ambitions or minding a lot about fashion will very unnecessary for those understanding the times. We are also commanded to *Watch therefore, and pray always that we may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.*" (Luke 21:36)

4. Given that somewhere during the last 3.5 years, the false prophet will rise up to promote the idol worship of the beast's image and to banish trading without the mark (*Rev 13*), we must develop practical means of surviving that period without needing to buy and sell. We can possibly do this by subsistence farming; using solar energy that doesn't require paying bills; preserving organic foods species and seeds instead of GMOs lest you will be cornered needing to buy seeds for planting; using water sources that don't require paying bills, e.g. your own boreholes; barter trade within church communities, and more. These proactive actions can be done at individual and family level or church community level for both preparation and implementation purposes. We were given the scriptures so that we can adequately be prepared. Even if many of us are destined to be martyred during this period, we should not die before our time and in a matter that is not prescribed from eternity, e.g. due to starvation, thirst and frustration, and end up missing out on the crowns predestined for elected martyrs. Remember, some of us will survive these times and be part of the rapture.

To the Jews in Jerusalem and nearby, they are commanded to flee to the wilderness and to pray that their flight is neither winter nor Sabbath.

Matthew 24:15-22, NKJV.

"Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand), 16 "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 17 Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. 18 And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. 19 But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! 20 And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath. 21 For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. 22 And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened.

Therefore it is not a matter of emphasizing a false sense of Christ centered hope while oblivious of the rootedness of hope in tribulation, for God in His sovereignty chooses what tribulations to allow a believer go through as part of our spiritual maturity and purification process:

Romans 5:1-5, NKJV.

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. 3 And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations,

knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; 4 and perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

James 1:2-4, AMPC.

Consider it wholly joyful, my brethren, whenever you are enveloped in or encounter trials of any sort or fall into various temptations. 3 Be assured and understand that the trial and proving of your faith bring out endurance and steadfastness and patience. 4 But let endurance and steadfastness and patience have full play and do a thorough work, so that you may be [people] perfectly and fully developed [with no defects], lacking in nothing.

We should not hinder endurance and patience from doing its work in us, if we are called to it.

This and many other articles and books I've written demonstrate beyond a shade of doubt that the rapture of the church will take place after the great tribulation and the appearance of the son of man. Right now, in terms of conscious awareness, the odds are against the church – whereas the next major event in Bible end time prophecy is the great tribulation, many are expecting the rapture. The earlier the entire church realizes that very soon, as many as will remain alive, will go through the great tribulation, the better prepared we will try to be, not only spiritually but practically. May God bless you with wisdom and power to do the right things? In Jesus' name.

Feedback and wisdom is highly welcome so that we can throw more light on this subject as and when required. God's blessings ~ **Gideon Wananda**