#### INTRODUCTION

A nervous young preacher was preaching his first sermon. His topic was the Second Coming of Christ. He quoted from Revelation 22. He ran toward the edge of the platform and said with great enthusiasm, "Behold, I come quickly!" But he lost his train of thought and didn't know what to say next. So he just ran forward again and said, "Behold, I come quickly!" He still couldn't remember what to say next so he tried it again, but with more force. He stepped forward and said, "Behold, I come quickly!" But he tripped on a cord and lost his balance. He fell right into the lap of an old deacon who was sitting on the first pew. The young preacher said, "Sir, I'm so sorry!" The deacon said, "Don't worry about it, son. You warned me three times that you were coming."

Did you know newspapers have a certain size font they use only for mega-events? It's called Second Coming type. It was used to announce the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Second Coming type was used to announce the assassination of JFK, and it was used on September 12, 2001 after the Muslim terrorist attacks on America. This font is so large the words jump off the page and say, "Read me!" It's interesting they don't call it "Major events type," or "Breaking News Type." They call it Second Coming type. Why? Because there is no larger event that will ever occur than the return of Christ.

Somebody put together a list of how different newspapers and magazines might report the second coming.

Sports Illustrated: GAME OVER! U.S.A. Today: WE'RE DEAD!

The Wall Street Journal: DOW PLUMMETS AS WORLD ENDS!

National Inquirer: SPACE ALIENS INVADE!

Microsoft Systems Journal: APPLE LOSES MARKET SHARE

Rolling Stone Magazine: THE GRATEFUL DEAD REUNION TOUR

Ladies Home Journal: LOSE 10 POUNDS BY JUDGMENT DAY WITH OUR NEW

ARMAGEDDON DIET!

New York Times: MILLIONS DISAPPEAR: OBAMA BLAMES BUSH

ADMINISTRATION;

Mad Magazine: YES, ME WORRY

People Magazine: BRAD AND ANGELINA FINALLY MARRY!

Christianity Today: SEE, WE TOLD YOU!

Some people think we're crazy to believe in the Second Coming of Christ. I like what Adrian Rogers used to say: "I may be a nut, but I'm fastened to a good bolt—the Lord Jesus Christ."

The Apostle Paul believed in the Second Coming. Let's see how he described it in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

"Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According

to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words."

After Jesus was resurrected, He spent forty more days with His disciples. The Bible says over 500 people saw Him in His resurrection body. Then Jesus gathered His disciples on the top of the Mount of Olives and He began to float up into the air. We call this the ascension of Christ. As He was floating up into the sky, can't you just see the disciples gazing at Him for as long as they could see Him?

If you're ever in New York City, and visit the Metropolitan Museum of Art, you can view this unusual painting by the German Artist Hans von Kulmbach. There are many paintings of the ascension of Christ, but in this one, the artist portrayed only the feet and lower legs of Jesus as He floats out of the picture. You can see the nail holes in His feet. Kulmbach portrayed the disciples and Mary watching Jesus rise toward the sky. He also painted a couple of men dressed in white. That's true to scripture because Acts 1:11 says there were two angels there and they said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven." Did you catch that? Just as Jesus rose up through the clouds, that's what's going to happen when He returns. Let's learn three exciting truths about the second coming.

## I. THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST IS REALLY A SERIES OF EVENTS

The study of end times is called Eschatology. The most important thing you can learn about eschatology is that when we speak of the second coming of Christ, we're not talking about something that happens on one day. There are a series of events that occur. If you want more information on this, I suggest you get my book, *Revelation: God's Final Word*. But to understand the context of our scripture, let me mention three eschatological events.

## A. The Rapture could happen at any moment

The next thing that is going to happen on God's prophetic calendar is the rapture of the church. Some people complain that the English word "rapture" doesn't appear in the Bible, and they are correct. But the English words "trinity" or "missions" don't appear in the Bible either, but we believe in the trinity and missions. Paul wrote that believers who are alive at the coming of the Lord will be "caught up." That's the Greek word *harpazo*. For many centuries the only Bible translation used was the Latin Vulgate, and the Latin word is *raptio*. That's where we get the word "rapture."

The last recorded words of Jesus are found on the last page of your Bible. It's where Jesus said, "Yes, I am coming soon." (Revelation 22:20)

## B. The Reign of the Antichrist will last seven years

After Jesus raptures the church, there will be a political leader who will become the first global leader in the history of the world. At first, he will be seen as the greatest peacemaker of history. However, his true demonic nature will be revealed. We call this the tribulation, because Jesus said in Matthew 24 that this would be a time of great tribulation like the world has never seen before.

We'll talk more about the Antichrist when we get into 2 Thessalonians. But notice how Paul describes this leader: "He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God." (2 Thessalonians 2:4)

The reason we know this period will be seven years is because of the prophecy of Daniel 9. This coincides exactly with the vision John had in revelation.

#### C. The Return of Christ will be to win earth's final battle

Many people are confused about the second coming of Christ, because there are passages that speak of Jesus coming as a thief in the night, suddenly and secretively. Then there are other verses that speak of Jesus coming in glory and every eye will see him. So which one is it? Yes. It's both. When Jesus comes secretively, that's the rapture—and He only comes in the clouds and we are caught up to be with Him. But seven years later Jesus will return in glory leading a heavenly army to defeat the Antichrist at Jerusalem. Those of us who have been raised from the dead or raptured will return with Jesus as part of His army. But don't worry; you won't need to fight. It will be the world's shortest battle. In Revelation 19, we read that a sword will come out of the mouth of Christ and He will slay those who have gathered against Israel and against God. That means Jesus will only need to speak a word and the enemies are destroyed.

That coincides exactly with what Paul wrote would happen to the Antichrist. "Then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming." (2 Thessalonians 2:8)

There's an old saying that a picture is worth a thousand words. There are plenty of end-times charts that have so many details and pictures they are hard to figure out. First, Jesus will come in the clouds and rapture the church. We'll be reunited with our loved ones, and we'll be taken to heaven. The first event that happens in heaven is the Judgment Seat of Christ. This isn't a judgment about who is saved and lost; this will be the time when rewards and crowns will be given. But don't think you'll be wearing a crown for eternity, because the Bible says we're going to cast our crowns at the feet of Jesus. Then there will be the glorious marriage supper of the Lamb in heaven. While that's happening in heaven, the tribulation will be occurring on earth. That's described in Revelation chapters 6-18. Then at the end of the tribulation, Christ returns with His Saints. The Battle has often been called the Battle of Armageddon, but it's actually the Battle of Jerusalem. The word Armageddon only appears once in the Bible, Revelation 16:16, and it says that the Antichrist will gather his armies at Armageddon, which is about 50 miles north of Jerusalem.

#### II. JESUS WILL APPEAR SUDDENLY WITH NO WARNING

In Matthew 24, Jesus said no man could know the day or the hour, so whenever you hear someone who tries to set a date for the return of Christ, you know immediately they are not speaking from God.

But Jesus did say you could look for the season of His return. He said when the fig tree puts forth its leaves you know summer is coming. The greatest sign that the return of Christ is near is the fact that there is a nation called Israel in existence today. The fig tree has put forth leaves again. There was no Israel for 1,900 years, but today, God has gathered Israel back to the land promised to Abraham. You can't ignore that.

But I'm not really looking at the signs; I'm listening for the sounds. Paul said there would be three sounds that announce the return of Christ. First, there will be a loud command from the Lord. I don't know what He will say, but we know that when He speaks, the dead in Christ will be raised and we'll be raptured. Perhaps, Jesus will say what He said at the tomb of Lazarus, "Lazarus, come forth!" Perhaps everybody sleeping in the grave will hear their name called, "Come forth!" And every living believer will hear our names, "Come forth!"

Then Paul said there would be the voice of the archangel. There's only one archangel: Michael. As the leader of all the angels, I believe he will be calling the angels to assemble for the events during the tribulation.

Then there will be the trumpet call of God. What's that? I believe it will be God calling the nation Israel to assemble for the battle they will be facing. In Numbers 10:10 God told Israel, "When you go to war in your land, you shall blow an alarm with the trumpet."

Now, it's important to realize that this event will happen instantaneously. Some people think Jesus is going to parachute down and there will be plenty of time to fall on their knees and repent. But the Bible says it's going to happen in the twinkling of an eye. Paul wrote, "Listen, I tell you a mystery: [and some church nurseries have posted this above their doors] We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed." (1 Corinthians 15:51-52)

When Jesus comes back, it's going to happen quickly. The twinkling of an eye isn't the same as a blink of the eye. If you're really fast you can blink your eye in about 1/400<sup>th</sup> of a second. But a twinkling means you are looking through a crowd for someone and when you see them, your eye twinkles with recognition. One Greek scholar said the twinkling of an eye is the time it takes light to travel from the front of your eyeball to the optic nerves behind your eyeball.

Every time I mention that I recall something that happened to me years ago when I was in North Carolina speaking to a group of college students at a retreat. I was talking about the second coming and these students were hungry for the Word. They were really engaged and taking notes and following every scripture, all except one guy. He was sitting by himself and he didn't even

have a Bible or notebook. He looked like your typical nerd, or Geek. He had thick glasses, and a plastic pocket protector in his shirt. He even had a calculator clipped to his belt.

When I made that statement about the twinkling of an eye being the time it takes light to travel from the front of your eyeball to the optic nerves, he whipped out his calculator and started pecking away on it. It was one of those old scientific calculators that had a little thermal printer built in, so I could hear the hum of the paper coming out of it.

I thought, "I'm trying to teach the Bible, and this guy is doing his physics homework." So I tried to ignore him. After the session, several students were talking to me and I noticed this nerdy kid in line. He came up and said, ".6 nanoseconds." I said, "Excuse me?" He shoved his glasses up on the bridge of his nose and continued. ".6 nanoseconds. That's how long a twinkling of an eye is." He showed me his print out and said, "Light travels at 186,234 miles per second, and I estimate the average eyeball is about 24 millimeters, so that's .6 nanoseconds." I said, "Wow. Is that fast?" He said, "That's fast."

.6 nanoseconds. Want to see how fast that is? Watch. Want to see it again? The point I'm trying to make is you need to prepare to meet Jesus now, because the rapture is going to happen so fast that you can't wait for it.

## III. THE RAPTURE WILL HAVE A GLOBAL IMPACT ON EVERYONE WHO IS LEFT BEHIND

What will the world be like the day after Jesus returns in the clouds? The dead in Christ will be raised, and we will be raptured. I don't think the world will really notice the resurrection of the bodies of Christians. Yesterday I stood in Memorial cemetery as we laid the body of Russell Adams to rest there. He was already with the Lord; that was just his shell. But I stared around at those graves and thought about the day when Jesus will return. Do think that dirt is going to fly and coffins will open up? Of course not. In that .6 nanosecond, the bodies of those believers will become like the resurrected body of Jesus. Jesus appeared to the disciples through a locked door, and then He disappeared from their sight. Six feet of dirt and a coffin or a vault will be like a thin curtain for those who are raised. And that brings up the question, "What about the bodies of Christians who've been dead for centuries? There's nothing left. They have decayed. Or what about Christians who were lost at sea, or burned, or even cremated? Can they be resurrected?" Of course. Remember your ninth grade science class? There's the law of conservation. There is only matter and energy in the universe. Matter can be converted to energy, but energy can never be created or lost, it can only be changed from one form to the other.

So imagine there was a Christian who died 18 centuries ago. One molecule from his body may be in a fish in the bottom of the Atlantic, another molecule may be in the North Pole, another could be out in space past Pluto. But when the One who created the Universe with a single Word comes back all He will have to do is speak the Word, and those molecules will come together and "BAM!" there's a resurrected body.

But I believe the rapture of the church will be considered the most historic event in human history. That's why they have the Second Coming type. Jesus said it would be like this, "That is

how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come." (Matthew 24:39-42)

Let me describe how this could happen. Imagine for a moment you aren't a believer. You're at the Ballpark in Arlington watching the Rangers play. There's a long fly ball hit to left field and ranger outfielder David Murphy runs back and positions himself to catch it. And in that instant, Jesus returns. The ball lands on the grass because David Murphy, who played at Baylor and is a committed Christian, is no longer there to catch the ball. Several of the players have disappeared. And suddenly about half the stadium is empty. You begin to hear sirens as emergency vehicles respond the traffic accidents that happened when cars and trucks no longer had drivers. Several jets on approach to DFW and Love Field crash because both the captain and the first officer were believers.

Now, can you imagine the level of global disaster that the rapture would be? You leave the stadium and get in your car and you are amazed at the number of car wrecks. People are in the street screaming that their family members disappeared. You turn on the radio and hear the news that there are reports from around the world of global disaster. There are nations with no leaders. The crisis will be the perfect time for a likable world leader to convince the nations of the advantage of one-world government and a global economy.

You finally make it home and turn on the news and Brian Williams from NBC comes on the air and you begin to fully see the impact of this event. I'm sure they'll try to find a scientific explanation. Brian Williams introduces some Dr. Wigglejaw from M.I.T. who comes on the air and says, "Apparently our planet passed through a cosmic field in space, and everyone with a certain metabolism was mysteriously absorbed into this cosmic field." And some people will say, "Oh, that explains it."

But you know better. Because you grew up in the Bible belt, you heard sermons on the Second Coming, and even though you never gave your life to Christ, you recognize what really happened.

I'm convinced on the day after the rapture, whether it's a Sunday or a Tuesday, every church in America will be packed with people who suspect what happened. They realize they were left behind. There will be deacons there to deac; they talked the talk, but they really didn't walk the walk. There will be choir members to sing, and worship leaders and pastors...who realize they knew about Jesus, but they really never *knew* Jesus.

#### **CONCLUSION**

I like to play hide-n-seek with my grandkids. They hide and after I count to twenty I say, "Ready or not, here I come!" One day Jesus will say, "Ready or not here I come." And you can't hide from the One who sees all and knows all.

So are you ready for the rapture? Of course, if you're not a follower of Jesus, you aren't ready. The most important thing you can do is to give your heart to Jesus today. You don't want to be left behind. You may think you're young and healthy; you won't die for many years, so what's the rush? But there's another deadline over which you have no control and that is the sudden, unannounced return of Jesus.

But if you're already a Christian, you may think you're ready for the rapture. But let me ask you a personal question: If Jesus appeared TODAY, would you meet Him with confidence or shame? There's a little verse in 1 John many Christians have never noticed. John was writing to believers, and he said, "And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming." (1 John 2:28)

So, if Jesus returned today, would you face Him with confidence, or with a little shame? Ray Stedman has written: "What are the alternatives awaiting Christians on that day? Well, clearly there are two, and only two. It is possible for us to have confidence before him, or to shrink in shame from him, one or the other. There is a false teaching that has arisen within Christian circles that suggests that the day of our appearing before the Lord will be a day only of the giving of rewards. There are to be no regrets, no shame, no negative notes at all; it is all sweetness and light. It is hard to understand how such teaching arises in the face of a Scripture like this where John warns that it is all too possible to shrink in shame before him at his coming."

I got to thinking, "What would cause me shame?" I made a list. I wrote down "indecent behavior." If I was doing or saying something vulgar or impure when Jesus returned, I would be ashamed, wouldn't you? Another thing I wrote down was "unresolved relationships." If I had a grudge or a spirit of unforgiveness against another believer, I would be ashamed to meet the Lord before I mended that relationship and asked that person to forgive me. Another thing I wrote down was "unfinished business." Maybe the Lord has led you to serve Him in a certain way, or to share your faith with a specific person. If Jesus came back before we did that, we would have a measure of shame. So, the take-away from this message is: Let's live in a way to be ready to face Jesus with confidence.

I can remember Dr. Vance Havner telling a story about a woman who was waiting at a train station. Her fiancé was coming to join her for their wedding. She stood in the station looking, longing, and waiting. The old stationmaster was there as well. He was watching and waiting for the train too, but for a different reason. He had the train schedule, and it was his job. He knew all the facts about the train, but he wasn't expecting the train the same way the bride-to-be was waiting. Dr. Havner said we should be waiting and watching for the return of Christ. But he said, "May God give us the spirit of that bride rather than the spirit of the stationmaster."

On the last page of our Bible, Jesus' last words were, "I am coming soon." And John's reply was, "Even so, come quickly!" Is that your prayer? Are you ready for the rapture?

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Personal Question: If Jesus appeared TODAY, would you meet Him with <u>confidence</u> or shame?

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David O. Dykes, Pastor Green Acres Baptist Church Tyler, Texas

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Pastor David Dykes